

GRAND MILITARY RIFLE SHOOTING ON THE CURRAGH - AUGUST 1860

The above novel and interesting display of military skill, which was to have come off on the 16th and 17th inst, but which was necessary postponed then, and on two or three occasions since, in consequence of the bad weather, took place on Friday and Saturday last, under very favourable circumstances, all things considered. The weather has been broken for so long a period that it appeared quite doubtful, in the early part of last week, whether there would be afforded, during the present season, another opportunity for carrying out any of those numerous schemes of amusement which have been published, but unavoidably put off, again and again, on account of the rain.

On Friday and Saturday, however, the sun shone out brilliantly, and gave the most cheering indications of the continuance of fine weather. Saturday, especially was a fine day, and though by no means as warm as might be expected at the present period of the year, it was still quite agreeable and suitable for out-door exercise and amusement. His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, who had previously intimated his intention of witnessing the sports and distributing the prizes, was present, accompanied by Major Baggot and a party of ladies and gentlemen. A special train started at ten o'clock in the morning for the accommodation of the citizens, but very few availed themselves of it, probably on account of the day selected, which was not convenient for people of business, so that the spectators were nearly all of the military class. The committee of management consisted of Colonel Blane, C.B. Assistant Adjutant-General, Colonel Mayow, C.B. Assistant Quartermaster-General, and Captain Thompson, Inspector of Musketry for the district. Gen. Sir George Browne, General Gascolgne, General Shlrley, General Bloomfield with staff, and several officers of distinction were on the ground during the day, and a superintendent of the firing parties.

The ground selected for the purpose was the extreme end of the Curragh towards Kildare, and in every way very suitable. The prizes were open to officers and soldiers of every branch of the service, but the number of non-commissioned officers and men was limited as follows, for every regiment of Infantry or company of Royal Engineers, in the proportion of two non-commissioned officers, a man per company, for every regiment of Cavalry or battalion of Military train, in the proportion of one man per troop, every battery of Artillery, in the proportion of one man per troop, every battery of Artillery, in the proportion of four men per battery. The non-commissioned officers and men were selected by commanding officers from among the best shots of the regiments. The competitors were to shoot with the long Enfield rifle, pattern 1853, with Government ammunition gauge 1855. The firing commenced at eleven o'clock and continued with little intermission until half-past four. The following is a list of the winners of the prizes on the two days.

FRIDAY

First competition – Distance 800 yards. Five rounds standing. First prize (£4) – Private McVea, Fermanagh Militia, Eight points. Second Prize (£3) – Captain Cookworthby, 60th Rifles, Seven points. Third Prize (£2) – Ensign McMurry, 15th Regiment, Seven Points. Fourth Prize (£1) – Sergeant Thompson, 20th Regiment, Seven points.

Second competition – Distance 400 yards. Five rounds standing or kneeling. First prize (£4) – Ensign Harris, 20th Regiment, Eight points. Second prize (£3) – Corporal Muller, 15th Regiment, Eight points. Third prize (£2) – Private Hill, 26th Regiment, Eight points. Fourth prize (£1) – Private Cooke, 16th Regiment, Seven points.

Third competition – Distance 500 yards. Five rounds, standing or kneeling. First prize (£4) – Private Hodgkinson, 20th Regiment, Seven points. Second prize (£3) – Lieutenant Storey, 26th Regiment, Seven points. Third prize (£2) – Private Hewett 76th Regiment, Seven points. Fourth prize (£1) – Private Laird, 96th Regiment, Seven points.

Fourth competition – Distance 600 yards. Five rounds, standing or kneeling. First prize (£4) – Private Head, Grenadier Guards, Eight points. Second prize (£3) – Private Laird, 96th Regiment, Seven points. Third prize (£2) – Private Burke, 26th Regiment. Six points. Fourth prize (£1) – Private King, Grenadier Guards, Six points.

SATURDAY

The Lord Lieutenant's prize were competed for on this day. They consisted of £25, £15, and £10. The Competitors were to be the thirty best shots that is, men who had obtained the greatest aggregate number of points at four distances in the prizes of the previous day. The distance was 700 yards and 800 yards, and the parties were to stand or kneel, at pleasure.

1st prize – (£25) – Private Sexley, Grenadier Guards – Fourteen points.
2nd prize – (£15) – Private Hutcbkinson, 20th Regiment, eleven points. 3rd prize – (£10) – Private Washington, 14th Regiment – 10 points.

Besides the above competitions, there were two others for file firing, and volley-firing, the prize in each case £15. The file firing took place at 400 yards distance. The parties consisted of 15 file or 30 men, non-commissioned officers and privates only, each man being furnished with six rounds. The prize in this case was won by the 16th Regiment, who averaged 6 1-16 points.

The prize for the volley firing was completed for by the same class. The distances was 600 yards, the parties kneeling, and each man being furnished with six rounds. The Grenadier Guards won this prize, having averaged 506 points. There was also a pool target on the above two open to officers and men at 6d. a shot, distance 200 yards, the bull's-eye only to count. In this case, Colonel Campbell, of the 20th Regiment, was most successful, he having hit

the bull's-eye. The success of this gentlemen is more remarkable as most, if not all of his competitors were far his juniors. The sport being over, his Excellency, who appeared much interested in them, distributed the prizes, and then repaired to General Gascoigne's quarters, where he having remained a short time, returned to town by Newbridge. It is agreeable to be able to state that an accident occurred during the day, notwithstanding that on one or two occasions parties exposed themselves to danger by crossing the shooting-ground, apparently unconscious of their perilous position. The firing, however, on these occasions was instantly suspended, and, the wights being warned off by the shrill blast of the bugle, were afforded an opportunity to cogitate calmly on the uncertainty of human affairs. Everything, in fact, passed off pleasantly, and the arrangements which were made by Captain Thompson were of such a character as to give the upmost satisfaction to all present.

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Transcribed by Matt McNamara - December 2017



The Enfield Pattern 1853 rifle-musket as used in the shooting competitions on The Curragh 1860