

The Rifle companies were, on the whole, good at their drill, and have all paid great attention to rifle practice. A large proportion have attended a course of class-firing,—which is noticed more fully at the part of my report on the shooting generally throughout the Colony.

One peculiarity worthy of observation is the great interest evinced in rifle practice by the country corps of this Province, and I must especially bring to your notice the East Taieri Company, composed of 43 enrolled members; of this number 41 attended class-firing, 33 becoming first-class men, and 28 marksmen. This company sent one of the most successful competitors (Private D. L. Christie) to the General Prize Firing in Auckland, who won the first prize in the fifth and sixth sets, the cup for the Martini-Henry match, the cup for the highest score in the match between North and South Islands, and the National Rifle Association Medal. He was champion in 1866, and was sixth on the list for the belt this year.

I was prevented from inspecting the Dunedin Volunteers as a battalion, by the heavy rain on the day appointed.

SOUTHLAND.

On 31st March there were two Rifle companies at Invercargill and Riverton, who were only tolerably good at drill, but much difficulty has been experienced in providing them with a qualified instructor. They have paid more attention to rifle practice, and several members have attended class-firing. They sent three representatives to Auckland, one of whom won four prizes, and another two.

WESTLAND.

This district has three Rifle corps, at Hokitika, Ross, and Greymouth, consisting of 216 members, of whom 189 were qualified for capitation. They have improved since last year, and several members have attended class-firing.

Their average in district firing is only second to Otago. Two representatives went to Auckland, one of whom won a prize and shot steadily in all the matches, being second of the South Island in the match between North and South, second in Martini-Henry match, and tenth in the aggregate for the belt.

RIFLE PRACTICE.

Before remarking on the General and District Prize Firing, I think it advisable to call your attention to return of class-firing marked B, from which it will be seen that only a small proportion of the Volunteers of the North Island have attended a course, in comparison with those of the South. This may be attributed to a variety of causes. In the North Island there has been a great difficulty in selecting suitable ranges; with the exception of the Auckland and Thames Districts, the Volunteers are almost entirely composed of country settlers, whose homes generally are at much greater distances from the rifle ranges than in the South. Moreover, in the North Island the permanent staff have heavy duties to perform in connection with the Militia, and have therefore less time to devote to the Volunteers; to this must be added the scattered state of the population, which in a great measure prevents men from giving the time necessary for class-firing, without interfering greatly with their daily occupations, and the staff are equally unable to fix upon days to suit all without interfering with their Militia duties.

In Auckland hitherto, the range has been too far from the town to admit of any class-firing, but this is now rectified, and I have no doubt the Volunteers will avail themselves of their new range next year.

At the Thames, where the population is concentrated and the range within convenient distance of the town, the numbers who have attended class-firing compare favourably with some of the districts similarly situated.

The same remarks apply in a less degree to Napier.

In Canterbury the proportion is smaller, but there has been much difficulty in obtaining suitable ranges.

In Otago the system of class-firing has been carried on for some years; the result of this year shows a steady improvement over last, as shown in the return marked I. As all the corps appear to have taken an interest in this important part of their duty, I think it right to attach the return received from the Officer Commanding the district. This includes a few Cadets, the only ones in the Colony (except 15 in Canterbury) who went through a course.

In Southland and Westland several members attended, the proportion of first class and marksmen of the latter district being very good.

COLONIAL PRIZE FIRING.

The annual meeting took place in Auckland during the month of March; the results, in detail, were published in *Gazette* No. 37, of 30th June, a copy of which is attached, and marked F.

The shooting, on the whole, was very good, and the success of the meeting was mainly owing to the excellent range placed at the disposal of Government by the Hon. Mr. Farmer, M.L.C., who also presented a cup for competition with Snider rifles. There was a considerable increase this year in the number of company representatives, from whom the men to go to Auckland were selected.

It will be seen, on reference to the *Gazette*, page 326, that the Province of Otago carried off more than half the prizes.

The Champion Belt was won by Captain Wales, No. 1 Company Dunedin Rifles, after a well-contested series of matches; and it is but fair to add, that the next seven on the list were all from this Province. This is the fifth year that Otago has won the Belt consecutively, which must be most encouraging to the members who attend class-firing so regularly, and should prove to others the advantage to be derived from it.

The match between North and South Islands, by ten men on each side, who had made highest aggregate scores in previous matches, was won by one point by North Island, after a most interesting contest.