

Rifle-shooting competition for Zurich boys

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RIFLE-SHOOTING COMPETITION FOR ZURICH BOYS.

Every year, a week before the federal "Day of Prayer," a shooting-competition is held for the boys of Zurich, and forms one of the most traditional festivities of the year.

During three successive holidays thousands of spectators pack the wonderfully situated rifle-range of the shooting-club of the town of Zurich at Albisgütli. Young and old alike enjoy this ceremonial festival, which dates back to the days after the thirty-years war. This shooting match originated in the 15th century preliminary training; for already at that time the conscription laws of the old Federation obliged the youth to learn the use of arms. The military spirit of youth manifested itself especially in the popularity of shooting, sometimes even "in a rather wild way" (as one chronicler writes) inside the town walls. All over the country, and especially in the centre of Switzerland, shooting-clubs for boys were founded. The young marksmen participated in shooting competitions, and their physical training comprised swimming, running and weight-throwing as well.

In the second half of the 18th century, when physical training for the youth was most intensely stressed, shooting for boys reached its peak of popularity. This was the time when the cadets corps were founded, forming a sort of obligatory warschool. In consequence of the revolution and the years of war around 1800, weapon-training for boys was all but forgotten. Only boys' shooting-competitions continued without a break through those hard years; but the participants did not know the exact use of their weapons as they do today.

It was only in the twenties of the last century that a new interest arose, when the institution of cadets was restored. At that time the boys' shooting matches became a real festival for the people of Zurich. On the selected day the drums sounded at dawn through all the streets of the town. The complete corps of cadets under the command of a drum-major marched at six in the morning to the musketry-range for the noble Competition. The afternoon was occupied in drill, and manoeuvres for the cadets in the environments of the town closed the day. In the meantime the organisation of the annual boys' shooting-competition was put in the hands of the Shooting-Club of the town of Zurich. The range was at the riflemen's house on the square, where nowadays the Central Station stands; after 1848 it was in the Sihlhölzli.

At that time every boy between 6 and 14, who went to school, had the right to fire one shot with the junior musket. Three targets were erected. The upper one was for the youngest marksmen, and for them the club gun maker held the musket, and the boy only had to pull the trigger. For the middle target the boy aimed and fired independently with supported musket, and at the lowest target the oldest boys fired holding the weapon themselves. After the distribution of the prizes there was a great banquet, at which the authorities, the civil servants and the town's marksmen participated. As this day was a holiday for a large part of the population, nearly the whole town celebrated that night.

Towards the end of the last century weapon training diminished, the corps of cadets was abolished and

the boys' shooting-competition lost their former importance. In 1899, six years after the town-union, the town's rifle-men moved from "Sihlhölzli" to "Albisgütli," and only then did they succeed, in collaboration with the town authorities, in re-instituting the boys' shooting-competition and extending it to the whole town. The first world war brought an interruption, but since 1920 this genuine Zurich Festival is celebrated with all splendour, and in recent years, the second Sunday and Monday of September have witnessed a real mass-exodus of young and old towards the Albisgütli.

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(1787-1875)

General Dufour was the founder of our modern army. For thirty years he strenuously worked to create a force worthy of its name. To honour his work the highest summit in the Swiss alps was named the "Dufourspitze."

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(1819-1894)

General Herzog hailed from the canton of Aargau; he was commander-in-chief of the Swiss army during the Franco-Prussian war (1870/71) and it was to him that the French General Bourbaki surrendered his force of 85,000 men; they were subsequently interned in Switzerland.

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(1848-1925)

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