



THE CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SA

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A service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

200 YEARS OF THE CAPE TOWN NOON GUN

The Noon Gun in Cape Town, as we know it today, was instituted at some time in 1806 in order to provide ships anchored in Table Bay with the accurate time required for navigation. The precise date has not yet been determined, but the Cannon Association of SA, who regard the Noon Gun as an icon among cannons, decided that the 200th anniversary of this famous institution could not pass without marking the occasion. The date of 16 December 2006 was chosen on the grounds that the actual date would probably have passed, that the weather would be suitable, and that many tourists would be able to witness or hear the proceedings.

The South African Navy, who have diligently provided this service for many years, agreed that the occasion could be marked by the firing of 20 cannon shots, one for every 10 years and that both Noon Guns could be fired, one at noon and the other 5 seconds later. One shot for every 100 years. We stress that the firing was not a salute, but the marking of 200 years in the history of Cape Town.

The 20 shots were fired by :-

1. Martin and Johan Venter with their 7 pdr RML on a naval carriage,
2. Jacobus van Niekerk and Leon de Vries on a ½ pdr on a garrison carriage,
3. MJ de Wit and Alf Parris on a ½ pdr on a sliding boat carriage,
4. Johan van Zyl and Jurg Zimmermann on a third ½ pdr,
5. Barbara, our only lady gunner, all alone on Ian's 2 pdr on a Gribeauval twin trail carriage. This was unanimously voted the loudest gun by the crowd of about 300 spectators.

Allan Delbridge, the Chief Gunner of Hout Bay acted as a combination of Town Crier and Battery Commander. One shot was fired every 30 seconds, in spite of the misfire gremlin making his usual appearance and then being promptly dispatched with a pistol blank.

Both Noon Guns were fired at noon. There was meant to be a 5 second delay between shots, but an unforeseen technicality resulted in something close to a half second delay. It appears that the firing pulse sent by the observatory is of two or three seconds duration. When the first gun fired, the controller immediately switched over to the second gun in preparation for a local firing, but the firing pulse was still present and the gun fired immediately. However the required result was every bit as good as the intended result.

The media did us proud with a 10 minute radio interview which was partly repeated on another station. The Sunday Independent published a page wide dramatic photo of Barbara and the 2 pdr with a 6m flame billowing from the muzzle. The picture also appeared in the Cape Argus. One element of the press regarded to event as celebrating an English tradition and decided not to keep their readers informed of what was happening.

In spite of seven requests, a sponsorship could not be found for the event. This was partly due to our late start and the fact that cannons are not cute and furry and do not have large googly brown eyes. However, the planning and preparations had progressed to a stage where abandoning the idea was out of the question and the commemoration was sponsored by the Cannon Association and some very good friends.

WE EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE TO THE FOLLOWING

1. The SA Navy, who came on board without hesitation.

2. Donald Bett of Fraser 4 Public Relations for arranging the media coverage.
3. The Military History Society for publicising the event.
4. Hout Bay and Llandudno Heritage Society for moral, physical and material support.
5. The City of Cape Town for tolerating a lot of noise.
6. The gunners who gave up their day to heave heavy guns into battery.

ACHIEVEMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

The past year has been very busy with the Durr Record growing to 906 guns, battle re-enactments, gun restoration, carriage building, gun proofing and much more. The Cannon Association has grown to 47 members and the readership of our newsletters has increased to nearly 400.

The main achievements are :-

1. The restoration of three more Dutch guns in the call-up signal system.
2. Twelve guns participated in the re-enactment of the Battle of Blouberg (86 shots)
3. The 6 pdr from Fort Schanzkop, "Susanna", has been fired at several Voortrekker and Boer War events around the country.
4. A Dutch gun was placed at Melkbosch as a memorial to the Battle of Blouberg.
5. The Hout Bay Battery of 18 pdrs fired a salute to the Swedish replica ship, the GÖTHEBORG, and received the appropriate reply.
6. Durbanville launched their 200 year celebrations by inviting the Mayor of Cape Town, Mrs Helen Zille to fire a cannon.
7. Through the efforts of Zane Palmer in Port Elizabeth, and our precise records, the cannon which was stolen from the library in Lydenburg was located near the Wilderness and returned to Lydenburg.
8. Ian van Oordt and I went to Pietermaritzburg to record and identify the 12 oldest guns in SA. The oldest of the 12 Portuguese guns, all off the SAO BENTO and the SANTIAGO, is dated C1514, that is 138 years before Jan van Riebeeck set foot in the Cape.
9. I, on behalf of the Cannon Association, delivered a paper on the Portuguese guns at the convention of the Society for Portuguese Maritime Studies in Mossel Bay. The delegates were treated to a display of cannon loading and firing procedures.
10. Ian and I have written an article on the Portuguese guns for publication in the journal of the Ordnance Society based in the UK.
11. The 6 pdr Dutch gun in the Tygerberg Reserve in Bellville has been fired several times during the year by Jurg and Neville. The firing of the gun has brought many people to the reserve for the first time and resulted in an increase in the number of visitors.
12. We have conducted protracted negotiations with the SAPS Registrar of Firearms, with SAAACA, Black Powder clubs, Firearm Training Establishments and any person or body who is involved in the formation of legislation regarding cannons and gunpowder.

The most important thing that we have achieved is that we have done everything safely and without incident. Let us keep it that way !

Best wishes for the festive season, and may your visitors not overstay their welcome !

Gerry de Vries

Scribe to the Cannon Association of SA.