



THE CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SA

11 Seaton Road, Parklands, 7441, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel/Fax: 021-557-1299

email: noongun@mweb.co.za



NEWSLETTER No. - 21 APRIL 2007

A service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

E-MAIL ADDRESSES AND RETURNED MAIL

I regularly have e-mail newsletters returned to me citing "address not located" or "oversubscribed" or "letter box full". I have approximately 400 e-mail readers and the list is growing constantly. I do not have the time nor the inclination to follow up on all of these anomalies. Naturally I make some effort for the paid-up members, but I cannot chase every reader. What I do when an e-mail is returned is I move that address into a "LOST" folder and leave it there. Readers should receive a newsletter every second month, if not, please e-mail me and advise of any changes that may have taken place.

BLOUBERG SHELL

Someone brought me a rounded and hollow fragment of iron two or three years ago and I have forgotten who it was that brought it.

The fragment was picked up on the landward side near the base of Blouberg Hill and was thought to be a relic of the Battle of Blouberg, 1806. I have since measured and identified the forgotten fragment as a piece of a common explosive shell from a Coehorn mortar or a 4,4 inch howitzer, both of which were in service with the English forces between 1770 and 1830.

The Cape forces under Gen. Jansens also had at least one Danish howitzer of the same calibre which is now in the Hout Bay Museum. The howitzer is light enough to have been dragged over the sand from the settlement and could have participated in the battle. The location of the discovery, close to Blouberg hill, when compared with contemporary drawings of the battle, indicates that it was probably fired towards the North West and thus by the Dutch at the English.

We thus know exactly what it is, but are not sure who fired it, nor do I know who it belongs to now. Would the owner please contact me.

THE PROOFING OF CANNON

In England the need for the standardisation of gun examination, testing and acceptance into service was identified by the Inspector of Artillery and his department published a set of regulations and guidelines in C.1785. These regulations applied to guns supplied by contractors to His Majesty's Services and to the East India Company.

The acceptable tolerances in dimensions, both external and internal, were provided to the contractors and these were subjected to the first examination on delivery. If the dimensions were accepted, then the gun was searched for "outward flaws and honey-combed defects", with a warning to the inspector, "the greatest possible care must be taken to check that no defects have been concealed by screws, plugs or hammering". "Should such measures be discovered, then the entire batch of guns would be rejected". Holes or pitting which were no more than one fifth of an inch deep were acceptable.

Once the gun had passed these tests it was taken to the proof ground, laid horizontally, (presumably on logs) and fired with a single iron shot and two wads in front of a charge of powder ("large grain of the very best quality") that approximated the weight of the shot (almost a tripple charge) up to the 12 pounder calibre, the charge diminished by about 30% for the larger calibres. After the proof firing the gun was again inspected for any flaws which may have become visible through the firing.

Should more than one gun in ten from a batch of guns burst during proof, then the entire batch were to be rejected. If one, or less than one gun in ten from a batch should burst, then the inspector was entitled to request further testing of two more guns from that batch. Should one of the additional guns burst, then the entire batch was to be rejected.

Guns that passed all tests up to this point were then subjected to a high pressure water test where the bore was filled with water and pressurised "by means of a powerful engine". This was followed by a careful cleaning and a last examination for defects.

Guns that passed all of the tests were marked with the broad arrow and accepted into His Majesty's Service, or with the crowned "P" for the East India Company.

The instructions end with, "Such guns as may be condemned are mutilated and returned to the contractor".

SOURCE – British Smooth-Bore Artillery – a Technological Study - David McConnell - Ottawa 1988 Page 388.

RECENT FIRINGS

The Hout Bay East Battery of seven 18 pdr Dutch guns entertained the Dutch sailors off the frigate TROMP by updating their understanding of gunnery C.1800. They loaded and ran out a gun and fired a single shot. All guns were then loaded and fired in rapid succession twice. Members Ian van Oordt, Jurg Zimmermann, Martin Venter, Jacobus van Niekerk, Johann van Zyl and Colin Twine assisted Alan Delbridge and the Hout Bay gunners and gained some experience in serving the larger guns. Ian also demonstrated his 2 pdr on a twin trail Gribeauval field carriage. Several bystanders insist that the 2 pdr made more noise than the 18 pdrs. The carriage, on spoked wheels made by Ian, passed its rugged roadworthy test when it was towed up the rough track behind a Land Rover.

The 6 pdr gun at Durbanville Hills Wines has been fired a few times for private occasions. This is proving to be a good draw-card and the firings are attracting attention to the vineyard.

Ryk de Wit fired his half pdr on Hooggelegen farm, much to the delight of some overseas guests.

Much smoke and noise was generated on 23, 24 and 25 March when 14 members and 13 guns participated in the SA Navy Festival. The navy provided 25 kg of their best gunpowder on condition that it was all expended at the festival. We fired every hour on the hour with 10 gun volleys, a 20 gun sequential firing and many immediate reload firings which gave several gunners the opportunity of experiencing the mayhem and confusion of battle. Three new gunners were tested and qualified during the shoot.

CARRIAGE REPAIRED

The old oak carriage which has supported the 3 ton Bocarro bronze gun at the Military Museum at the Castle for about 40 years collapsed when its front axle gave way. My son Leon, two assistants and myself managed to make a new axle and restore the dignity of this rare Portuguese gun.

MODEL CANNON FIRING

Rudi Roth in Switzerland informs me that he has joined a German model cannon shooting organisation and has to undergo a formal course in order to qualify. The nature and content of this course is of interest to us as it may further develop our own safety course. Rudi, a perfectionist in cannon measuring and drawing, comments that most of the cannons being fired in the club are exact replicas "of no gun that ever existed".

NEXT LARGE EVENT

The next event in which the CAOSA will participate is the celebration of Freedom Day on 27 April. Thirteen guns will pass a signal from Simon's Town to the V&A Waterfront via Hout Bay. The first gun will be fired at the False Bay Yacht Club in Simon's Town at 09h00 and then a gun will be fired near Lower North 17 minutes later. Guns will be fired sequentially every 17 minutes at Kalk Bay, Muizenberg, Wynberg Hill, Constantia Neck, Hout Bay, Suikerbossie Restaurant, Camps Bay, Kloof Neck, Signal Hill, the Noon Gun and lastly by the Mayor at the V&A Waterfront.

The 17 minute delay between guns allows us to include the Noon Gun in the sequence. Each gun will draw a number of local spectators if we can manage to get the press to publish the positions and sequence.

CANNON ASSOCIATION LOGO

The crossed cannons and vertical sponge logo that was designed by Jon Hall has been redrawn with greater clarity by Ian van Oordt and it is hoped that we will be able to publish the next newsletter on our new letterhead.

CAOSA GOLF SHIRTS

The new logo has been printed in white on navy blue cotton golf shirts and the first run of these shirts just made it in time for the navy festival. The shirt has a small logo on the pocket and a larger version on the back. Due to the explosives requirement for cotton and no synthetics, the shirts cost R100 each with about R10 going into the CAOSA coffers.

MEMBERS LIST

I have had several requests from members for a list of CAOSA members with contact details. This list will not indicate whether the member has a cannon or not, it is purely to facilitate contact and exchange of information between members.

It is my intention to publish this list to all 53 full members by the end of April. Should any member not want his name included in this list, please let me know as soon as possible.

SENTINEL WINES

Sentinel Wine Farm has been sold and the best collection of cannons in SA is in jeopardy. I am waiting to make contact with the new owner in order to establish his intentions and to offer the assistance of CAOSA if required. Four of the bronze Portuguese and Spanish guns are on loan at Sentinel and I have been in contact with the owner in Canada with a request that the guns now be displayed at Chavonne's Battery in the V&A Waterfront.

A SAD SETBACK

Jon Hall, CAOSA member No. 3 and co-author of our book "The ML Cannons of SA" suffered a serious stroke and had been in hospital for 10 days. He passed away on 5th April. I have taken the liberty to pass to on Kathy his widow, our collective condolences.

Gerry de Vries

Secretary to the Cannon Association of SA