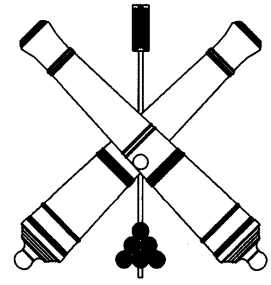


THE CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

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A service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

TWO CANNONS RESCUED

A contractor is busy with major renovations to the Grand Parade in Cape Town. Part of the work included the removal of two VOC cannons which served as bollards at the entrance on the Castle side of the Parade. One was cast at Overums in 1789 and the other is dated in the second half of the 1600's but foundry as yet unknown. Tim Hart, the ever alert archaeologist, enquired as to what fate awaited the cannons and he received confusing and contradictory answers. After several telephone calls and some sabre rattling permission has been obtained for the guns to be donated to Chavonne Battery. I am pleased to say that the Graaff Trust in Cape Town has agreed to sponsor the movement, cleaning, preservation and mounting of the guns, which includes the gun mentioned below.

At the time of writing all three guns have been moved to Chavonne and 9 man-days have been spent on hammering, chiseling, chipping, scraping and sanding off hard clay, rocks, cement and tar from the guns. The guns have been "hopped" into position and work has begun on the heavy wooden "V" blocks on which they will stand.

ANOTHER CANNON FINDS A HOME

Construction on the Amsterdam Battery began in 1784 and was completed in 1787. This was the largest gun battery built at the Cape and was initially equipped with fourteen 24 pdr, five 18 pdr and a few smaller flanking guns. Additional armament would be added as the importance of the battery, situated directly above the "new" harbour, increased with time. On 23 February 1787 Governor van der Graaff was invited to attend the proof and test firing of the guns. All went well until one of the 12 pdrs exploded under test and the entire rear section of the gun behind the trunnions was blown off and fragmented. Two gunners were killed and five others injured, among the injured was the Governor.

The exploded gun was unearthed at Amsterdam Battery several years ago and has been in storage at Lion Battery since. It has been decided to display this exploded gun at Chavonne's Battery as an item of interest.

CANNON PROPORTIONS

All too often one sees a model or replica cannon that, in spite of excellent workmanship, looks a bit odd and somehow does not represent what the viewer expected. This is most often due to the proportions being at odds with the whole.

During the 16th and 17th centuries the diameters of cannon were defined and ballistically designed around their calibre and not by the traditional measurement units. The outer diameter of a cast iron gun was three calibres at the vent and two calibres at the thinnest part behind the muzzle. The diameter of the trunnions was one calibre and the trunnion protruded from the

side of the gun by one calibre. The thickness of the wooden cheeks of the carriage was also one calibre, which makes sense if it is the same length as the trunnion. The muzzle swell is of the same diameter as the gun when measured at the trunnions and the button is approximately one calibre in diameter. These proportions were not exact, but were observed as a rule of thumb. When one or more of these proportions is out by a significant margin then there is something less visually appealing about the whole. CAOSA has a more detailed guideline for beginner model builders which can be e-mailed on request.

WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM RANGE ?

This, in one form or another, is the most frequently asked question whenever a cannon is fired at a public event, and the enquirer becomes testy when one cannot provide a simple answer. If the gunner is in a hurry or in a bad mood the answer may be 2,000 yards or 2 km or something similar. If the gunner knows the facts and is in a good and patient mood the hapless enquirer may be in for a lengthy science lecture.

Point blank range is the range at which the shot would first strike the ground if the gun was fired horizontally on level ground.

Maximum gun range is the distance between the gun at X degrees of elevation and where the shot will first strike the ground. X is in the region of 40 degrees but varies with other factors such as the weight of the gun, the type and weight of the charge used and the length of the bore.

Maximum effective range is that range at which one can reasonably expect to hit and damage the target. This varies with the type of sighting devices used, the nature of the target, the experience of the gunners and the weather. Maximum effective range from a land based gun and an identical gun mounted on a rolling, pitching and yawing ship can vary by something in the order of 70%.

By the time that the gunner has finished explaining all the ins and outs of this gunnery problem the enquirer and family are in the car and half way home.

THUNDER AND SMOKE

The past two months have again been busy with firings at several venues. In addition to the usual De Grendel and Chavonne Battery firings CAOSA members fired at 16h00 at the Paulaner Brewery at the V&A Waterfront on three consecutive Saturdays in support of the Octoberfest. There was also a firing at the opening of a new art gallery on the wine farm Kanonkop near Stellenbosch and a firing for a 200 member convention of neuro surgeons at the BOE Auditorium.

Eight members of CAOSA conducted the cannon firings for the Military Tattoo at the Castle in November. Jurg and Martin were the two senior Gunners and they were ably assisted by Erick Kellerman, Peter Wright, Patrick Shannon, Ryk de Wit, Johan Venter and Neville Potgieter. Mogamat Harley lent some decorum to the occasion in his authentic uniform and friends Gareth and Nadine Sheffield helped to make up numbers for the gun crews. Twenty shots were fired with one misfire which went unnoticed by the public in the confusion of battle. Marin Venter fired his 7pdr RML in Simon's Town in support of Aids Day and at the Kruithuis in Stellenbosch on 29 November in support of the "Tramakassi" Festival. The event was attended by some 1,500 people at any one time and after the noon firing all the church bells in Stellenbosch rang for about a half minute.

HELP NEEDED WITH CHEMISTRY

During a recent international visit it was proposed that an informal salute be fired with different colours of smoke. Various attempts were made by adding chemicals, powders, potions, eye of newt, chicken teeth and rocking horse droppings to the charge to create some colour, but all resulted in shades of white, grey or black.

Fireworks can do it, smoke grenades can do it, stunt flyers can do it, so it can be done, but how? Any suggestions and all help will be most welcome.

WORDS WORTH READING

Gabriel Athiros, a CAOSA member in Cape Town, publishes an A3 size 12 page newspaper in full colour under the banner of "The Cape Odyssey". This Cape history slanted gem is issued every 2 months and generally contains historical articles that have not been published before. The publication has just celebrated their 75th issue and their readership is loyal and growing steadily, which says much about it's content.

The web site is at www.historicalmedia.co.za and for subscription contact Nikolai Athiros by e-mail at hmedia@mweb.co.za

A JANUARY 2009 EVENT

January 6th is the date on which the English invaded the Cape and the Battle of Blouberg commenced. CAOSA commemorated this date with a large battle re-enactment in 2006 and with a series of cannon firings at the landing site in 2007. The plan for 2009 (one month away) is to stage a muzzle loading cannon exhibition at Chavonne Battery from the 6th until the 11th of January. The exhibition may be start with the unveiling of the three salvaged and restored guns on the 6th followed by daily noon firings followed by salvos, broadsides and mayhem on the Saturday 10th. The exhibition will include a photographic display and CAOSA members in period uniforms answering questions from visitors.

Much has to be done in very short time, but this is the way it has always been - and we made it work ! (Because plans don't make things work, people do).

Gerry de Vries
Secretary to CAOSA