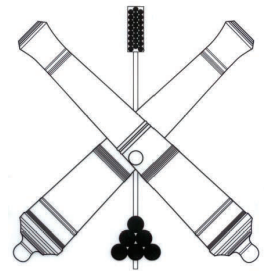


# CAOSA



Newsletter: August 2012



**Gerry De Vries, a familiar face at the Castle of Good Hope, where he entertains the public with cannon firing.**

## **GERRY DE VRIES - THE MAN AND HIS CANNON**

**G**erry De Vries Cdr SAN (Rtd) SM, MMM, CSM is well known as the founder of CAOSA and for his expertise in terms of ML cannon. However, very few of CAOSA's members know anything about Gerry De Vries, the man behind the establishment of CAOSA.

Here follows an interview with Gerry.

**Please tell us where you come from; where you were born and what your parents did for a living.**

I started life in East London because I wanted to be near my mother when I was born. I went to school in Cambridge and progressed to standard eight at Cambridge High when my father was transferred to the Income Tax HQ in

Pretoria where he was the head of the computer department. I then matriculated at Lyttleton Manor High in December 1965 and joined the SA Navy.

**Were your family members also interested in ML cannon and where did your interest in ML cannon start?**

My family members all had their own subjects of interest, my father hand built reflector telescopes as a hobby and my brother Andre is the National Recorder of Boxing in SA. My mother always supported us in whatever we undertook. My interest in cannon began soon after I published the book "Wingfield" in 1991 and I found myself without something to keep me busy. The Noon Gun fell under my Command and I was often asked questions about it, but I could not find much info on it. Some assistance came from established historians like "Mac" Bissett, Dr Dan Sleigh and Natie Greef. The powder was ignited when the Curator of the Tower of London, Guy Wilson, visited the Cape and I took him up to Lion Battery. My raw and uninformed enthusiasm must have impressed him because three months later a parcel of seven rare books on cannon arrived from him. Now there was no turning back.

**Where did you obtain your vast knowledge about ML cannon?**

Knowledge is like an oak tree, it grows seasonally and very gradually. I have always been a good listener with a firm belief that you learn most while your mouth is shut. I trawled through the Archives, libraries and museums and read everything that I could find, which was not much. Friends, family and colleagues who went overseas were always asked to spend some time in book shops, this resulted in a large collection of books on the subject. Internet and e-mail contacts added to what I learned while travelling all over SA on five or six cannon searches.

**Who had the biggest influence on your interest and knowledge pertaining ML cannon and why would you say so?**

I believe that the greatest influence came from Rudi Roth, an established authority on ML cannon and a typical Swiss perfectionist, whom I invited out to SA and toured the country with him for five weeks. I learned more from him in five weeks than I could from all of the books at my disposal.

### **What was the scariest event ever that you have experienced with ML cannon?**

The scariest event occurred in the Eastern Cape when I probed down the bore of a gun and disturbed a nest of hornets. They were angry so I ran for about 2 minutes and took about 45 minutes to get back to the gun.

### **What was the funniest event ever that you have experienced with ML cannon?**

My son Leon and I found it necessary to investigate a road sign that pointed to "KANON" along the coast toward Port Elizabeth. Kanon turned out to be a closed and locked holiday camp, but three cannon could be seen in the yard. We hooted and shouted but there was nobody there. Undaunted I decided to climb over the high barbed wire gate to record these guns. Leon passed my equipment through the gate and recording began. Next was a shout "Look out Dad"! as two large Rottweilers came thundering towards me. I grabbed my large measuring vernier and prepared to fight to the death. The nearest dog screeched to a halt in front of me and offered a paw. With formal introductions completed I carried on with my work. Only when I left did I find out that the second dog, which had a 4 litre bladder, had peed in my camera bag. A cowardly sneak attack!

### **When and why have you established CAOSA?**

CAOSA was established at a meeting of all interested parties on 20 January 2007. We wanted to pool our resources and set a formal set of aims and objectives.

### **Where was CAOSA established and who participated in its establishment?**

CAOSA was formed in a restaurant on Ryk de Wit's farm Hooggelegen. There were 15 founder members and Martin Venter had the fastest wallet draw in the country so he became member No. 1. Myself, Allan Delbridge, Dave Cowley, Alf Parris, Leon de Vries, Ryk de Wit, Peter Wright, Jurg Zimmerman, Barbara George, Neville Potgieter are still serving and then there was the late Jon Hall. A few others fell by the wayside.

### **What is your dream for CAOSA?**

When a small band of us formed CAOSA we had a set of lofty goals, some of which were fairly ethereal, to stop the loss of cannon through the scrap metal trade by promoting cannon as items of value to the community and to encourage an attitude of custodianship as opposed to ownership of these heritage items. I do believe that we have succeeded in achieving these goals to a significant degree. We have made a difference !

### **What advice do you have for the future generations who will carry the CAOSA torch, which you lit?**

It is of vital importance that CAOSA remain respectable in the eyes of the public and of the authorities. Research, recording, recovery, history and presentation of cannon must always enjoy a higher priority than just making bangs and smoke. Firing cannon must be just the cherry on top, not the main course and it must be done in a structured and disciplined manner.

### **How would you like the CAOSA fraternity to remember you when you are gone?**

I would like to be remembered as the old guy who said, "No matter how well you are doing, you can do better".

### **CAOSA IS NOW IN THE CASTLE OF GOOD HOPE**

**T**hanks to the efforts of Gerry De Vries, CAOSA succeeded in obtaining a room next to the Sally Port, which leads from the rear bailey, referred to as the Wapenplaatz, to the outside of the Castle between Katzenellenbogen Bastion and Nassau Bastion.

We intend to open our Head Quarters to the public over weekends for viewing. Inside they will find (among other displays) our model Napoleon Cannon as well as a model of the 9-inch muzzle loading cannon, which is located at Middle North Battery in Simon's Town.

We also want to provide opportunities for the public to fire our quarter-pound cannon inside the Wapenplaatz, as a fund raising opportunity. To achieve this we need our trained gunners to report for duty. In order to make a success of this and to spread the workload, we will draw up a duty roster of all interested parties, to assist with the overseeing of the exhibits, as well as with the firing of our quarter-pounder cannon. Anyone who is interested to assist should contact Johan Brand at [secretary@caoasa.org.za](mailto:secretary@caoasa.org.za).

### **NEW EXPLOSIVES ACT ON THE WAY**

**O**n 22 August the CAOSA EXCO had the opportunity to provide input into the draft Explosives Act, which will replace the current Explosives Act. From our perspective it was a very constructive and fruitful meeting.

Some of the highlights are as follows:

If everything goes as planned, it might become possible for CAOSA gunners to obtain permits for purchasing 5kg of blasting powder, which is a whole lot more affordable than black powder, which currently costs almost R1000 per kg.

Some more good news is that the draft legislation is contemplating a dispensation where your cannon will be stipulated on your Black Powder Permit (BPP). This means that it won't be necessary to buy a black powder rifle or pistol in future in order to obtain a Black Powder Permit. Your cannon will suffice!

## CAOSA AND SAPS WORKS CLOSELY TOGETHER

**T**he CAOSA EXCO realized that while the current Firearms and Explosives legislation were not exactly written to suit our activities, we should engage with the South African Police Services to find the best way to deal with the situation. After all, the last thing that we want is for CAOSA or any of its members to get into trouble or for the reputation of the organisation to get tarnished. Therefore the Chairman took the initiative to meet with Colonel Steenkamp of the Pinelands Explosives Branch. During this meeting the Chairman told Colonel Steenkamp about CAOSA's aims and objectives. Together they established a protocol for public firings by CAOSA, with the SAPS's approval. The protocol is as follows:

The CAOSA EXCO must be informed of all public firings under the CAOSA banner at least one week ahead of time, in order for EXCO to inform Colonel Steenkamp about the place and time that the firing will take place. Colonel Steenkamp will then inform the local SAPS. In this way the SAPS will be kept informed of our activities, which should go a long way in avoiding trouble with the Law.

So, if you are a CAOSA gunner, please inform the chairman at [chairman@caosa.org.za](mailto:chairman@caosa.org.za) of your intentions before

## THIS MIGHT KEEP YOU OUT OF TROUBLE

**P**lease observe the following and stay on the right side of the Law, for your own good as well as for protecting CAOSA's reputation.

1. You may not be in possession of black powder without a valid Black Powder Permit.
2. You may not buy black powder from anybody who is not a licensed dealer.
3. You may not sell black powder to another person if you do not possess a license to do so.
4. You may not donate black powder that you purchased to anyone.
5. You may not possess blasting powder unless you possess a valid permit to do so.
6. You may not have more black powder in your possession than what your Black Powder Permit allows.
7. You must keep your original Black Powder Permit where you store your black powder.
8. You must store your black powder in a safe or lockable steel cabinet.
9. You must have your duplicate Black Powder Permit with you when transporting black powder.
10. You may not carry out any activities relating to explosives unless you have a permit, or act under the direct and constant supervision of someone who is in possession of a permit, or is a member of the SAPS or SANDF performing official duties under a lawful instruction.

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

**T**ime is not standing still. Almost a third of the current CAOSA Executive Committee's (EXCO) term of office has passed since the AGM of 2012. However, the current CAOSA EXCO can look back onto a very busy and productive period that have passed, despite the departure of two of the elected committee members. Both our elected treasurer, Nadine Sheffield, as well as Martin Venter resigned due to personal reasons preventing them from serving CAOSA as they would have liked to. John Farelo was co-opted to replace Nadine as the new treasurer and we decided not to replace Martin at this time.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank John for making his time available to serve as our new treasurer. I am very impressed with the work that he has done so far.

At our first meeting the CAOSA EXCO revisited CAOSA's objectives as stipulated in our Constitution. We also decided to employ sub-committees to assist us in achieving those objectives. The need for the following sub-committees was identified (with the conveners in brackets):

- Gunners' Board (Gerry De Vries)
- Training (Erick Kellerman)
- Events (Martin Venter)

Martin agreed to remain the convener of the Events sub-committee for as long as possible.

So what has happened over the past four months?

- EXCO has signed off on a training program and a proposed unit standard for obtaining national accreditation for the training that CAOSA provides.
- We have submitted the proposed unit standard and are tracking its progress through the SAQA system.
- We have applied for SAPS accreditation and are waiting for feedback from the SAPS.
- Patrick Shannon has spent a lot of time and effort on drafting a new constitution for CAOSA in a participative and inclusive process, to serve our purposes better in the foreseeable future.
- EXCO has engaged with the SAPS on firing protocols to keep CAOSA out of trouble when firing in public.
- EXCO has provided input for a new Explosives Act.

Not too shabby, if I may say so.

## EVENTS CALENDAR

- Heritage Day firing of the 9-inch cannon at Middle North Battery in Simon's Town (24 September)
- Heritage Day firing at the Castle of Good Hope (24 September)
- Military Tattoo (to be advised)
- Battle of Blaauberg (to be advised)