

# MUZZLE LOADING CANNON OF SOUTH AFRICA

A Guide For The Enthusiast

## NEWSLETTER No. 6 - November 2002

A free service to the muzzle loading enthusiast

### THE "AGF" MYSTERY SOLVED

Guns 550 and 654 both show the letters AGF on the first reinforce. In both cases the letters were partly eroded and we were not sure if it was AGF or ACF. The answer has come from Javier Lopez Martin, a fellow cannon enthusiast who is busy with his Ph.D at London Guildhall University. The letters are the initials of Antonio Gomez Feio, a Portuguese gunfounder 1640 - 1650.

### MORE ON GUN 409

In newsletter No. 5 I mentioned the 32 pdr which was dug up in Simon's Town and bore the markings C A B on the trunnion. My morale sponsor in Switzerland, Rudi Roth, informs me that the "C" stands for Calcutts Works in Jackfield, Shropshire. The "A B" stands for Alexander Brodie, the gunfounder at that works between 1786 and 1811. Using the serial number 276, Rudi established that the gun was cast in 1798 and was proof fired at Woolwich prior to March 1799.

### DOLPHINS

Since the earliest days of gunfounding it was common practice to fit lifting handles to the upper parts of the gun. The earliest lifting handles were in the form of iron or bronze rings which fitted permanently into large lugs on the gun. Some guns had two lifting rings and some had four. When two rings were fitted they were positioned as close as possible to the centre of gravity of the gun, somewhere just behind the trunnions. When four rings were fitted they were so positioned that the centre of gravity of the gun was in the centre of the square formed by the rings.

In c.1600 Dutch and Portuguese gunfounders began casting the two lifting handles in the form of dolphins or fish, hence the name "dolphins". Individual founders developed their own designs and generally persisted with that style. Some guns had a third dolphin cast vertically on the cascable in stead of a button. One common error among model and replica builders is to place the dolphins directly above the trunnions, which is too far forward. If breech preponderance is considered, then the centre of gravity, and thus the dolphins, must be behind the trunnions.

Although other designs of dolphins in the form of snakes, leaping animals and others appear on some guns, the name "dolphin" has stuck.

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### ARRESTED AS A BOMBER

Nico Fourie, of the Old Fort Museum in Bloemfontein, arrived at the Africa Militair Exhibition at Waterkloof Air Base with a few kg of gunpowder in his car. The powder was meant for the Krupp gun which was to be fired at the show. "Anything to declare"?, and our honest comrade Nico replied that he had a container of gunpowder. "Click, click" went the handcuffs and Nico found himself in the guardhouse. One or two telephone calls later and the matter was cleared up, but not before a rumour of a bomb scare reached the Americans, who informed the RAF and both groups prepared to fly out of the show.

It apparently took some convincing that all was a misunderstanding before the two foreign air forces relaxed.

Would someone please remind Nico that the Boer War was over a century ago, and that we no longer annoy the English with sulphurous compounds.

### DONATION OF GUN 425 [\(see picture\)](#)

Durr 425 is moving to Noorhoek to a new home. The new home is in Muizenberg through an agreement with the local Heritage Society. The previous owner, Mrs Klootwyk, has, via myself, donated the gun to the gun recovery program. A kind sponsor from Marina da Gama has sponsored the refurbishment of the gun, the clearing of bore and vent, the construction of a carriage and a set of loading equipment, the proof firing of the gun and its installation in Muizenberg. Rumour has it that Muizenberg residents feel the need to defend themselves from that Republic on the other side of the Peninsula.

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### BORED-UP GUNS

One of the many traps that our forefathers set for us was the modification of guns from their original specifications to something completely different. Sometimes, depending on the type and condition of the gun, the bore would be damaged or worn and in stead of scrapping the gun, they would repair it by re-machining the bore to the next higher calibre. This could not be done with all guns, only those types which had, subsequent to manufacture, proven to be over-engineered and had more metal around the bore than was required for safety.

To the casual observer, measuring the bore only, a gun could be classified as a 24 pounder. This assumption is correct, but when other dimensions are recorded and attempts made to identify the 24 pdr gun in the official records, the gun cannot be found. A gun of identical dimensions, other than the bore, can be found under 18 pdrs. Sometimes a bored-up gun can be identified by the fact that the original weight has been crossed out and a new, lighter weight inscribed on the gun.

Gun 600 in Bloemfontein is of 9 pdr calibre, but the dimensions of the gun are those of a 6 pdr. This has been confirmed in the contemporary lists of the Master of the Ordnance, there never was a Blomefield pattern 9 pdr of 6 ft length, but the dimensions and weight of gun 600 match those of a listed 6 pounder. This is thus a 6 pdr gun which was bored-up to a 9 pdr.

It appears that deliberate provision for boring-up was made on some occasions with a new gun being bored with a smaller calibre than the gun design called for. Durr 17 and 18, against Lions Head give an example of this provision. The guns can be found in the official records of 1757 (date in use - not date of manufacture) as 9 pounders of 6 foot length, but these two guns are bored to 95mm, or 6 pounder only.

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### GUNSMOKE

**PAARL** - Gun 420, the 6 pdr on Paarl Rock has been fired for the first time in living memory. Once again the idea, initiative, enthusiasm and drive to fire a gun came from a single individual, in this case Johan Malherbe of Paarl. Now that he has proven that it is possible, and that the gun can become a useful asset to the town, I hope that other locals will join him in restoring the dignity and presence of this historic gun.

The gun had not been proof fired and I did not want a crowd of people around when we fired it for the first time. Rumours spread fast and by 07h30 there were about twenty people on the rock and more approaching from all directions. I immediately reduced the charge by 30% in order to provide a larger safety margin. The result was more of a whoosh than a bang, but it was heard in town and the point was made.

**SIMON'S TOWN** - Gun 425, listed as being in Noordhoek, but destined for Muizenberg, has been fired. With great pain and significant blood loss, we cleared the bore and vent and chipped, scraped and painted the exterior. We took the gun to East Fort in Hout Bay and proof fired it with 310gm of powder behind a bag containing 2kg of shot blasting grit.

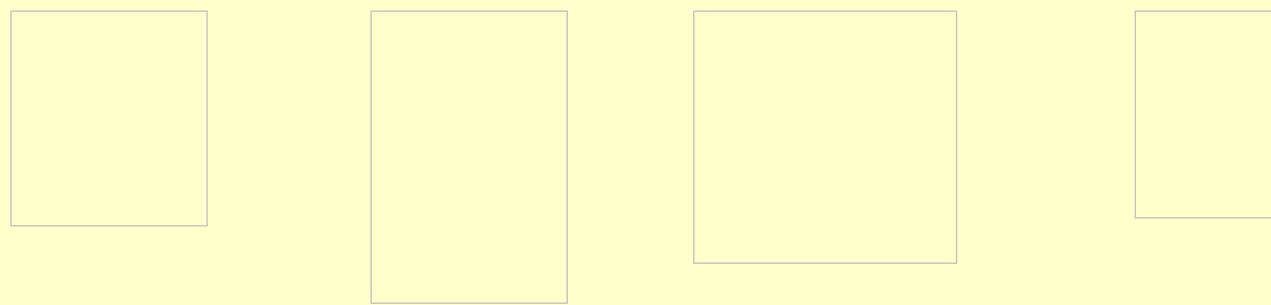
On 30 September we carted the gun and partially completed carriage to Simon's Town and fired a 250gm blank shot for the official opening of a whaling tourism project. The project seeks to develop interest in the historical aspects of whaling to compliment whale watching tourism in the Western Cape. Contact person - Kenny Botes on 083 416 3062 or e-mail on [whalemark@freemail.absa.co.za](mailto:whalemark@freemail.absa.co.za).

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### ENGLISH PROOF MARKS

Gunfounders in England had financial difficulties arising from the procedures specified and followed by the Board of Ordnance. The founder would receive an order for a number of guns to be cast to the given specification. Once completed these guns were transported to Woolwich, or one of the other proofing grounds, where they were subjected to strict measurement of all dimensions, pounding with hammers, their bores being pressurised with water to check for porosity, and a violent proof firing with a double charge of powder.

Should a gun, in the opinion of the authorities, fail the proof for any reason whatsoever, then that gun was deemed to be the property of the founder and was returned to him, sometimes at the cost of the foundry. The founder, who had made significant investment in the guns, was only paid for those guns which passed the proof.



### EXAMPLES OF ENGLISH PROOF MARKS

The guns which passed the proof were then marked accordingly and issued into government or merchant service. These marks, either stamped or incised deeply into the gun, took different forms.

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### RUSSIAN GUNS

After the Crimean War, the British dispersed hundreds of captured Russian guns around the Empire, particularly to those colonies which had contributed to the war effort. There is a group of enthusiasts who are trying to locate and identify these guns. Many have turned up in England, Ireland, Canada and elsewhere. I know of no Russian guns among the 800 pieces in SA, but the record is incomplete. Should any readers know of Russian ML guns anywhere in the world, please let me know.

### SPONSORSHIP

In previous newsletters I mentioned that some readers had proposed that some sort of fee be charged to cover the costs of printing and distributing this letter. I am quite sure that I politely and gently rejected the idea as some Durr Estates sponsorship money was then still available. Two kind readers would not take "no" for a valid answer and have sent me contributions towards the costs. Thank you for the assistance. Rudi Roth in Switzerland did also unilaterally and maliciously enrol me as a member of the Ordnance Society in England, and he paid my membership for two years in advance. The OS is a world-wide organisation and the benefits of membership are enormous, so are the membership fees when you try and pay in Rands. Thank you Rudi !!

### STAFSJÖ IN SWEDEN

Peter Gibb has made contact with Willy Ohlsson, a cannon historian in Stafsjö, Sweden where our guns marked "VB" came from. Willy is most impressed by the fact that Hout Bay still fire Stafsjö guns. It appears that we have more of their guns than they have because Willy is trying to retrieve one from another centre for them to place at the museum in Stafsjö. Peter sent him some photographs of the guns in action which made Willy green with envy.

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