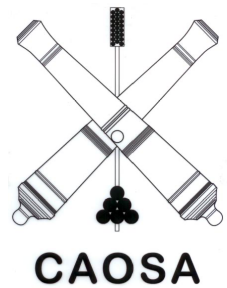


CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

Cannon Association of South Africa c/o
Chavonnes Battery Museum, Nedbank Building,
Clock Tower Precinct,
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SAPS Registration number: 28/1/3/8/2/1 23704

NEWSLETTER No. 63 September 2018

An informative service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

THE SCREW GUN

Officially termed “Ordnance RML 2.5 inch jointed” the gun was most commonly known as a screw gun. The breech half of the gun was joined to the chase by means of the junction nut which was integral with the trunnions. Assembly of the gun was done by standing the breech section upright, fitting the chase section into a keyway which ensured alignment of the two sections or rifling, and screwing the junction nut, which was captive on the chase section, onto the breech section until two marked lines were in alignment.

The two halves each weighed 200 lbs, the optimum weight for a horse or mule in mountainous terrain. The carriage would have been on the third animal and the wheels on the fourth. These would have been followed by two or three horses carrying the ammunition and equipment.

The trunnions each have a small gas escape hole drilled through them from the outer end to the joint cavity so that any failure of the copper gas ring would be noticed.

Originally intended as mountain artillery or for use in small boats the screw gun was used as main artillery when nothing else was available.

Cecil Rhodes’s town defenders had two during the siege of Kimberley and Baden Povel used two screw guns very effectively during the siege of Mafeking. The guns were fired, moved to another position, fired again and then moved again. In this manner did Baden Povel give the Boers the impression that he had more artillery than he actually had.

There are five 2.5 inch screw guns recorded in the Durr Record.

A “SIGNAL GUN”

There is a tendency among salvage divers and others to refer to swivel guns, early breech loading guns and small cannon as signal guns. This is not true as I have never seen or heard of a gun designed specifically for signalling. Cannon were designed and manufactured as weapons which fired shot of some kind with which to annoy the enemy.

The fact that when a ship or harbour needed to send a cannon signal of some kind they fired a blank in one of the smallest guns that would suffice for the distance required. This was done to conserve gunpowder which was as expensive then as it is today.

GUNNERS – WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

When gunners are firing a muzzle loading cannon there are a sequential routines to be followed, pre-firing checks, layout checks, spectator checks, the firing routine, and the post firing routines. It is far too easy for these routines to become boring habits to which little or no logical thought is applied.

For example, during training I normally include a firing where the charge is not made up beforehand, and the gunner is instructed to load with loose powder using the ladle as a measure. This normally

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goes well and a suitable wad is placed in front of the charge to keep the loose powder in place. The next step in a normal routine is to prick the charge through the vent, which the gunner does because it is part of the normal routine. Only when I ask what exactly he is pricking does the gunner begin to think.

Similarly I have seen gunners casually sponge the gun with a sponge that fits loosely into the bore and continue firing. What he should be doing is imagining those small smouldering embers in the gun, which are just waiting for him to ram some gunpowder down the bore, and acting accordingly.

The reason for worming the bore after a shot is to remove any significantly large remains of the previous shot's packaging. When aluminium foil is used, as most of us do, there is most often a piece of foil remaining in the chamber. When inserting the worm gently the gunner can normally detect this foil by the resistance it offers to the worm. A half twist in the correct direction will snag the foil and allow it to be pulled from the bore. When the worm is shoved roughly into bore and turned several times, as some do, the tines of the worm roll the foil into a ball between the tines and it cannot be grasped.

Routines are important, but must not be applied without being aware of exactly what you are doing.

FIRINGS

There have been several cannon firings over the past couple of weeks but members are failing to let me know the what, where, when, who and WHY of the occasion.

Martin Venter fired at the Clovelly Golf Club on 19 August for their open day, he fired various cannon at the Voortrekker HQ in Paarl on 25 August and he fired the 6 pdr on the stoep of The Posthuis in Muizenberg for the Heritage Foundation on 2nd September.

Johan Brand fired the 6 pdr at Ke Monate near Durbanville at 13h00 on 1st September.

Ryk de Wit and I proof fired Durr 1013, a 12 pdr Swedish gun on the farm Hooggelegen on 06 September.

SALVAGE (on land)

Durr 980 is an 18 pounder Swedish gun that was dug up in Orange Street a couple of years ago. After the usual publicity stunts, fanfare and newspaper exposure the gun was dumped behind the Info Office in The Gardens and then forgotten – except for CAOSA. Jurg Zimmerman and I went to identify the gun where it was buried under rubble and broken park benches. I wrote to SAHRA and suggested that it should be cleaned, painted and presented to Chavonne's Museum, I received no reply.

Years later Martin could not take the delays any longer and he and his wife Desiree (cheap labour) spent days chipping and cleaning the gun before painting it. Martin has apparently arranged a good place for the gun to be displayed. Well done both of you!

BASIL MILLS DOES IT AGAIN

Basil, the wild man of Graham's Town, has built two full sized replicas, one of the English 6.3 in Howitzer and one of the "Long Tom" as used by the Boers during the Boer War at Kimberley and at Mafeking. Both replicas are destined for The Fort in Johannesburg where the Howitzer will play the daily part of a noon gun which will be fired by means of gas. The two replicas took 6 weeks each to complete. I will forward a picture to the Webmaster for consideration.

Should we, muzzle loading aficionados, tell Basil that the Long Tom was a breech loader?

SOME CLARIFICATION REQUIRED

CAOSA is an important and carefully regulated organisation which is monitored by the SAPS Explosives Branch. It is thus important that all rules and authorities issued are clearly defined and understood by all members. Over the past two years there have apparently been changes which are not clearly understood by all members.

There seem to be various classes of gunner authority; who is allowed to fire in public; who may fire under the CAOSA banner; who may proof fire a cannon; why are some older gunners not included on the qualified gunners list?

Surely any public firing by a qualified member of CAOSA is under the CAOSA banner? Surely the qualification to proof fire a cannon depends on the knowledge and experience of the person and not on his allegiance to any clique or in his geographical location? Does qualification as a gunner expire? There are more questions which need clarification; perhaps we need a workshop of gunners to draw up clear definitions of the terms and conditions required.

Comments by the Chairman

Reading these newsletters are always a pleasure, but it is shocking to read that some members are disgruntled and dissatisfied and does not follow the correct channels to raise their concerns.

All the rules and requirements set by the SAPS more than two years ago was made known to all members, there are some that just forgot them or neglect to follow them for their own reasons. If you are in possession of the Constitution, Code of Conduct for members and gunners, Indemnity form for gunners, Safety manual and done your cannon training as per SAPS requirements, you should be up to speed and should not have any problems. The ball is in your court.

Remember the committee and gunner's board are there from you for you, none of them can smell you have a problem unless you are set off and are a misfire.

I would also like to make use of this opportunity on behalf of CAOSA to congratulate you on your birthday during September month:

Phillip Hugo	15/9
Dario Ermacora	16/9
Johan Venter	20/9
Jurg Zimmermann	21/9
Holgar Heye	21/9
Basil Mills	21/9
Hendrik Tsitsi	23/9

UBIQUE

Gerry de Vries