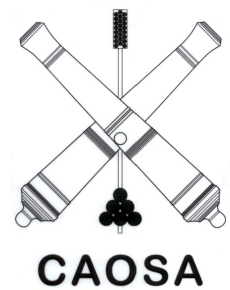


CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NEWSLETTER No. 64 October 2018

An informative service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

THIS ISSUE DEALS WITH THE TACTICAL USE OF ORDNANCE DURING THE 1700s

THE LIGHT GUNS

In this category are all cannon with a shot weight of 9 pounder and less.

On land the light guns normally accompanied and supported the infantry on campaign, threatening and damaging enemy defensive positions and disrupting formations of troops. A well trained gun crew could gallop into position, unlimber and begin firing on the enemy within three minutes and they could get off up to four shots per minute. When the battery consisted of four guns this would provide a substantial amount of fire brought down on the enemy.

Light guns were also used to defend one's own position by returning fire on enemy artillery or to discourage or weaken any cavalry or infantry assault. It is interesting to note the theoretical employment of various types of ammunition in the event of a cavalry attack.

The six pounder iron guns were to open fire with round shot at 1600 yards, change to grape shot when the enemy approached 650 yards and to canister shot at 300 yards. Bronze guns did not fire grape shot, but fired canister shot instead. Cavalry would advance for the first half mile at a trot; cover the next quarter mile at gentle gallop and then the last quarter mile at a full charge, the whole taking about 6 minutes. Each gun would be expected to fire eight round shot, two grape shot and two canister shot during this advance.

Light guns at sea were mainly used against the men on the opposing ship. The lighter guns of up to 2 pounder calibre were positioned on the highest decks and any suitable position in the rigging so that they could fire downwards onto the enemy decks. Light guns were also deployed in boats when the occasion required. The 6 and 9 pounder guns used at sea were longer and heavier than those used on land and they were normally positioned on the upper gun deck where they fired either solid or grape shot as the target indicated. The long 9 pounder with their slightly superior range and hitting power were often used as chase and stern guns.

THE MORTAR

The mortar, a chambered weapon, had its trunnions situated on the base ring and fired at a fixed elevation of 45° from a huge block of wood termed a "bed". The range was varied by varying the propellant charge and the time of flight was varied by cutting the fuse on the shell to a length which coincided with the arrival of the shell at the target. These were long-winded and laborious procedures and made the mortar unsuitable for a rapidly changing battlefield. Mortars were best employed as siege weapons or for defending one's own position as they were not as readily mobile as were the field guns.

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On land mortars could lob common shell or incendiary carcass over defensive walls or into trenches and attack the softer underbelly of the enemy.

At sea heavy mortars were fitted into purposely modified ships termed “bomb ships” and were used to bombard enemy land positions from seaward.

HOWITZERS

The earliest howitzers were essentially a slightly lengthened mortar with the trunnions moved to the centre of the piece. They were fitted to special field carriages much the same as for field guns and they could vary the elevation at which they fired, making them more mobile and useful on the open battlefield. Howitzers could fire over the heads of friendly troops and into enemy formations at short tactical ranges and spread devastation with their explosive shells. It was with howitzers that the creeping barrage was invented where a continuous rain of fire preceded own advancing troops by a few hundred yards keeping the enemy’s heads down and blinding them with clouds of smoke and dust.

CARRONADES

The first carronades were manufactured by the Carron Company in Falkirk, Scotland in 1787 as short, very light guns with a relatively heavy shot with which to defend the company’s trading ships. The Royal Navy, whose tactics at the time included closing the range as much as possible, ordered some carronades for trials. After successful trials the navy ordered more and of greater calibre but with a mounting loop beneath the gun as opposed to the traditional trunnions.

Within 10 to 15 years opponents learned to avoid the battering meted out by carronades by keeping out of range of the carronades while effectively returning fire with their longer guns. Carronades, having played their part in warfare at sea, were soon relegated to the roles of secondary armament aboard ships, flanking guns at coastal batteries or for defending key road junctions.

GUNADES

When the carronade fell from grace many foundries in various countries faced great financial losses and their futures were in jeopardy. Someone, nobody knows who, decided to adapt the carronade design to make it longer and pivoted on traditional trunnions while retaining the general shape and the muzzle cup of the carronade. Essentially a cross between a cannon and a carronade these were quickly termed “gunades” and they were intended for the commercial market where they were popular. In many parts of the world gunades were pressed into military service when nothing else was available.

THE HEAVY GUNS

With the exception of certain light bronze 12 pounder guns mounted on field carriages, any guns of 12 pounder calibre and upwards were classified as a heavy gun. The heavies were essentially guns of position, being too heavy and cumbersome when accompanied by their ammunition and equipment for deployment on an open battlefield. They formed the core of siege trains and their purpose was to batter and destroy enemy gates and fortified positions.

The heavy guns were ideal for coastal and harbour defence batteries, where their heavy shot and longer range capabilities could dissuade the enemy from attacking these positions from seaward. Guns at shore batteries had a distinct advantage over the guns on ships in that they were situated on a very stable platform whereas those on the ships had to deal with the rolling and pitching of the ship. When they exchanged fire the coastal guns had a large ship at which to aim and it did not matter where the shot struck the ship, the ship's guns had to try and hit one of the guns at the battery and hitting the fortifications was of little effect.

The 18 and 24 pounders at sea and at coastal batteries were supplied with a wide range of projectiles which were intended to degrade a ship's sails and rigging thus reducing the ships ability to manoeuvre. These projectiles took the form of bar shot, two balls connected by a wrought iron bar, chain shot connected by a short chain and several others which rotated in flight and would tear sails to shreds.

The heavy guns at sea were the ultimate bombard, their function was to penetrate the sturdy hull of the enemy ship and cause such damage as would cause the enemy to flee or to hoist the white flag of surrender. In spite of 56 pounder and 48 pounder guns bombarding each other at short range, it was an exceptional case if a ship sank, they were either captured or set on fire if the situation was not appropriate for capture.

RECENT FIRINGS

John Farelo fired in support of the MOTH Memorial service at the SANLAM Centre in Bellville on 19 August.

Johan Brand fired the 6 pounder at Ke-Monate to entertain restaurant guests as he regularly does on the first Saturday of the month.

There were several cannon firings on 24 September, Heritage Day. Martin and Harry fired the 9 inch in Simon's Town and proof fired Dario's half and quarter pounders and Alf's half pounder at the same venue. Frikkie and Riaan fired the six pounder on top of the Gantouw Pass for the Heritage Association and I fired for the visitors at the Castle of Good Hope.

Frikkie fired two shots at the Durbanville shooting range on 28 September in support of the fun day for a group of lawyers.

Frikkie and Riaan supported the Veteran Machinery Expo on the farm Delvera near Stellenbosch on 29 and 30 September with several firings of their ¼ and ½ pounders. Alf and I visited them at the Expo and we were impressed by their professional representation of CAOSA.

Martin fired two shots in Langebaan for the opening of the sailing season for their yacht club, and fired at Chavonne's Battery for the sail-past for the Royal Cape Yacht Club on 06 October.

NEW MEMBER

We welcome a new member number 184 to CAOSA in the form of Alfred de Vries. Alfred is not a family member of mine, so you cannot blame him for anything - yet.

From the Chairman

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

Dr Dieter Noli
James Page-Macdonald
Bowen Boshier
Roelof Hugo

It is also with great sadness that I must inform you that one of our previous members, Theodore Yach have passed on Wednesday 18 October 2018 after been admitted with asthmatic complains. I have passed CAOSA's condolences to the family, please keep them in your prayers.

UBIQUE

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