



NEWSLETTER No. 10 - APRIL 2004

A free service to the muzzle loading enthusiast

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 9

The readership of these bulletins is increasing all the time. Letter No. 9 went to 288 readers, but these are only the initial recipients. I keep getting comments and bits of information from people whom I do not know, but they refer to my newsletters. I am very happy to hear that the letters get passed on to other interested parties, particularly via e-mail.

Thanks to Dr Dan Sleight for sponsoring the postal copies of the last letter.

AN INTERESTING POSSIBILITY

The question of what guns were used by the Dutch forces at the Battle of Blaauwburg has intrigued me for some time. The following pieces of information may go some way towards answering the question.

There are two long, thin Indonesian guns in the Engelenburg House Museum in Pretoria. These guns are "lantakas", a very distinct Indonesian design.

According to Marie Koopmans-De Wet in 1924, pages 160 to 164, the lantakas were among the guns used at the Battle of Blaauwburg and that a third gun was at Koopmans-De Wet House in Cape Town. The guns were apparently stored in the Kruituis in Stellenbosch after the battle, and Dr Engelenburg had secured the two Pretoria guns from there.

According to DW Krynauw in the book "Beslissing By Blouberg" there was a Javanese light artillery unit of 4 guns among Jansens forces.

Page 84 - " 54 Ligte Javaanse artillerie te voet".

(Translation - " 54 unmounted light Javanese artillery".)

Page 111 - " De Javaanen die de vier veldstukken bedien hebben met brandende lonten geparaadeert hadden, met slaande trom uit het casteel getrokken".

(Translation - The Javanese who served the four field pieces paraded with burning fuzes and left the Castle with drums beating".)

According to G de Vries and J Hall, today, there are only four lantakas known to be in South Africa, the three mentioned above and one privately owned in Hout Bay, (Durr 776). The Hout Bay lantaka was apparently rescued from a scrap merchant in Cape Town several years ago. (There are now 4 additional lantakas on public display at Sentinel Wines near Stellenbosch).

My gut feeling is that "probability" would be a more accurate word than "possibility" in the heading of this insert. I am working on it.

VOORTREKKER MONUMENT GUN

The 6 pdr gunade, Durr 457, which was donated by Cape Town High School, has been successfully mounted and proof fired at Fort Schanskop, an affiliate of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. The gun is representative of some which the Voortrekkers (Pioneers) took on their migration inland from the Cape.

The intention is to fire the gun on special occasions in support of a wide range of cultural and historical events. Thus does another gun contribute towards its own upkeep and ensure that it has a future.

According to a decision from the mining board on the 20th of December 1690 he received the felling right for the common lands of the crown in the parish of Kila for the usual recognition fee. Those were vast forests - about 3215 acres. Gerdt Störning was a very rich man. He bought several farms.

There was no iron ore in Stavsjö and it had to be brought down from Svärta. This iron ore made Stavsjö gun foundry well known all over Sweden and in other parts of the world as its cannons enjoyed great success in Europe. Seven years later Störning got the privilege for another blast furnace and the right to "cannon and munition casting". After a devastating fire in 1915 there were none of the old records left, but it is assumed that Stavsjö delivered about the same amount of cannons as Svärta factory and that Störning was the leading cannon manufacturer of Sweden.

In 1671 there were cast 98 cannons in Stavsjö - all twelve-pounders with the total weight of 165 tons. It is also known that during the 1680s the factory delivered at least 80 cannons each year - from 24-pounders, which had to be brought along by sixteen horses to 3-pounders, which could be managed by four horses. Now and then production was interrupted. On the 1st of August 1686 the blast furnace burnt down but Störning could complete his promised deliveries by moving production to Svärta gun factory. Stavsjö was exempted from taxes for two years in order to rebuild the blast furnace.

Georg Thomas Berchner was born in Dringen in Germany. He was 18 years old when he came to Gerdt Störning as an accountant. Berchner soon became an able mining expert. After nine years, in May 1669, he married Störning's daughter Elisabeth. He became a very rich man. When Störning died in 1692 Berchner inherited some of his estates and properties, including Svärta, Wlrå and Stavsjö with farms, cottages and woods. He is described as one of the most skilled and successful leaders of the Störning-Berchner factory complex. For his merits he was made a noble in 1691 under the name of **Von Berchner**. He died in 1705 and is buried in Nicolai church in Nyköping. He had five children.

Gerhard Von Berchner was born in 1670 at Svärta and he inherited his father's factories and estates. He seems to have closely followed his fathers work and devoted himself to managing and operating the factories. There were no problems to sell cannons and other weapons in the first decades of the 18th century with wars going on continuously. But the Crown was practically bankrupt and debts grew all the time. The foundry proprietors thus had to give large and long-term credits. This raised the demand for large sums of money and Gerhard Von Berchner disposed of some reserves. In the years of 1706 and 1707 he provided cannons from Stavsjö for the brigantine FAHAMA and the galleon SCHILDPADDEN. All the way from Bender he got orders for cannons for the Swedish army. But there were also several problems. When casting a large-calibre cannon on July 18, 1717, the iron broke out and set the blast furnace on fire. But it was rebuilt in one year.

In 1719 the Russians burnt down some towns and villages on the Swedish East coast. As they surely had bitter experiences from the cannons of Stavsjö the whole place was burnt down, including a large part of the woods and several thousand loads of stored charcoal. The only remaining building was a storehouse called the Russian kitchen, which is still there. The losses of property were estimated to 57 340 dalers and copper coins and equipment to a value of 35 404 dalers.

In the years 1772-1725 Von Berchner rebuilt Stavsjö factory and the mansion. He died in 1729 at the estate of Svärta.

NOTE (by Gerry) Guns cast by Gert Störning were marked in relief with "GS" in scroll on one trunnion end. The well known "VB" markings on Stavsjö guns are the initials of Von Berchner, and not Ulla Berchner as reported in newsletter No. 7.

THE BIRTH OF FIELD ARTILLERY

Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden was the first militarist to realise the value of light tactical artillery on the battlefield. Until Gustavus' developments in c.1630, guns had been siege weapons for attacking the castles or forts of the enemy, or for defending one's own strong points. Siege weapons were used to batter the walls of the enemy positions and cause them to crumble and offer a breach through which the attacking infantry could gain access.

The heavier the shot that the siege gun could fire, the greater was the effect on the defensive wall. Siege guns thus became larger and heavier as siege warfare dictated, they also became cumbersome and more difficult to transport to the point where they were required. Guns were too heavy, and the requirements for building suitable firing positions too time consuming for guns to be used on the open battlefield.

Gustavus Adolphus adapted 2 and 4 pdr guns with more mobile horse drawn carriages and deployed them in support of mobile infantry. His remarkable successes were eventually understood and adopted by other European countries. The English only began using mobile artillery in 1704 at the Battle of Blenheim. Uncle Adolf may be the father of field artillery.

THE MONTAGU GUN

Prof. Pat Irwin kindly sent me a pamphlet from the Montagu Museum upon which there is a photograph of a large bronze cannon with dolphins and ornate scroll work around the coat of arms on the first reinforce. There is a very corroded old iron gun on "Kanonkop" (Durr 745) above the town which was mounted there by the Mayor, Mr K Knipe in 1988. This gun, which came from Simon's Town, replaced an old 8 pdr gun which gave the hill its name.

The original gun was placed there in 1825 by the farmer, Abraham Verreyne for the firing of shots on days of celebration. In 1852 while firing repeat shots for the inauguration of the new church, a young man named Jackie had both his arms blown off by an early discharge. (A clear warning to modern cannoners!) In retaliation, the local farmers threw the gun over precipice into Lovers Walk.

In 1877 the engineer, Hendie, who built the Cogmanskloof Pass through the area, found the gun and moved it to Rooival Outspan in Ashton, where, during a ceremonial firing, it burst. (another warning!)

Now! Back to the bronze gun. Nobody seems to know where the picture on the pamphlet came from. Vewwy Vewwy fwustwating !

SLOW MATCH

The slow burning, actually smouldering, wick that was held in the linstock and used for "putting fire to the gun" was termed "slow match". Slow match was made by boiling cotton fibres in a mixture of saltpetre and finely ground gunpowder and then drying it in the sun.

A mixture of 1 ounce (28g) of saltpetre and ¼ ounce (7g) of fine gunpowder suspended in 1 pint (0.5 litre) of distilled water was brought to the boil. The 6 ft length of loosely woven cotton cord was then laid in the mixture and boiled for 15 minutes.

Once properly dried the slow match would smoulder away at a rate of about one foot (300mm) per hour. The gunner would advance the slow match in the clips of the linstock as it burned away.

When slow match was made in bulk it was wound with wide spacing on a drum formed of wire to dry. Slow match was issued to ships and batteries in skeins of 35 yards, each weighing 7 pounds.

THE FIRST THREE OWNERS OF THE STAVSJÖ FOUNDRY

Source: **Dancing Around the Iron**, by Hans Lidman (in Swedish).

(The translation below was received by the late Peter Gibb from Willy Ohlsson in Stavsjö, Sweden.)

Gerdt Störning, 1609-1691, the founder of Wlrå, Svärta and Stavsjö factories, discovered Stavsjö on one of his frequent horse rides. At that time there was only a small soldier's cottage. The place, which he discovered, was very suitable for a blast furnace. It was located close to the old King's road; it had resources for water power with 18 meters height of falls. The distance to the gulf of Bråviken was only ten kilometers. So he soon started his activities. The woods of Kolmården surrounding Stavsjö were large, dense and unused. According to the decision by the county court of Jönköping, on the 17th of October 1666, Störning got the right to the forests of Djupviksnäs in the parish of Björkvik.