

# CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

Gunners Room, The Castle of Good Hope Cape Town

SAPS Registration number: 28/1/3/8/2/1 23704



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## NEWSLETTER No. 56 May 2015

An informative service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

### GUNNER TRAINING & GRADING

CAOSA has always endeavoured to meet the most stringent requirements from the SAPS, from patrons and from the gunners themselves. The standards set by CAOSA need to be of a high order to give the gunner confidence and to ensure that a CAOSA qualification is accepted as being credible by the authorities.

The Board of Gunners has decided that each qualified gunner will have a personal file which contains his/her training and evaluation record as well as copies of any documents which could put a patron at ease regarding the conduct of an apparently dangerous activity on their premises or at an event organised by them. This file would stand CAOSA in good stead in the event of any accident at a public firing and would defend the reputation of CAOSA from any accident caused by a non CAOSA individual who does something stupid.

The SAPS require that CAOSA train and qualify our gunners by means of an open book examination, a closed book examination and a rigorous practical assessment by qualified gunners as in the case of the normal black powder permit qualification.

The Board has implemented the updated system and the most senior gunners, including myself, are first on the list to go through the three steps to attain the defined qualification. Let's avoid complacency and treat the new requirement as refresher training, particularly for those gunners who have been inactive for a while.

I learned some new tricks and I was reminded of a few things which I had forgotten, re-doing the training has value! Let's all get on board regardless of our vast previous experience.

### PROPORTION

The development of muzzle loading cannon eventually led to the well-proportioned machine that we are familiar with. The dimensions of the gun are in proportion to the shot that it fires and the correct powder charge is in proportion to the weight of the shot. The thickness of the wood for the carriage is one calibre, barrel length is nominally 20 calibres and the trunnion diameter is a proportional one calibre. When any aspect of the gun is out of proportion the whole system looks odd.

All that we now need to perfect is the proportional behaviour of the gunner. The old gunnery manuals call for three firm thumps of the rammer when ramming a charge, a wad and a shot at the same time. The firmness of these thumps should also be in proportion to the calibre of the gun and the nature of the ammunition being loaded, not seven massive thumps when loading a blank into a ¼ pounder. The pricker should be rested on the charge and after ensuring that the charge is in place pressed into the charge once to create the required hole in the charge. Yet we see gunners who assault the gun with several vigorous stabs of the pricker. The worm sometimes rotates in the chamber at 365 RPM and rolls the foil into a little ball which rolls around between the tines of the worm and cannot be extracted.

More is not always better!

## THE COST OF TRADITION

A recent article in the Argus bemoaned the high cost for the 1,3 Kg of gunpowder used daily for the firing of the Noon Gun. The cost is covered by the City Council who pay the SANDF the same rate that the SANDF paid for it. The SANDF bear the costs of transport, storage, making up the charges and for the salary of the man who tends the gun. There are those historically challenged people who would discontinue the firing of the Noon Gun if they had their way.

A noon gun has been fired in Cape Town since soon after the English occupation of the Cape in 1806 and by calculation has fired more than 60,000 times, it is a rather well established tradition. The Blomefield 18 pounder cannon has the distinction of being the oldest cannon in daily use worldwide and the practise has since been copied in New Zealand, in Edinburgh, Scotland and elsewhere.

The Noon Gun gave the world that sombre ritual of a short pause in memory of family or friends who have lost their lives. On 14 May 1918 Sir Harry Hands, the Mayor of Cape Town instituted a two minute pause after the noon gun in order to direct thoughts to the men who were dying in World War I. After the war Sir Percy Fitzpatrick (author of Jock of the Bushveld) who lost his son in the war, wrote to the King and suggested that the two minute pause should be observed annually. The King liked the idea, stated his wishes and, thanks to the Noon Gun the pause in memory was born.

The firing of the Noon Gun is Cape Town's oldest living tradition and is famous in every corner of the globe. I believe that, sooner or later, CAOSA will be called to arms to defend this tradition, a task that should be tackled vigorously.

## SLOW MATCH

DEFINITION – A length of cotton rope that burns hot enough to ignite gunpowder, but slow enough to last for a protracted battle.

It is unprofessional and embarrassing when a gunner needs to fire his cannon in public and all he manages to do is re-arrange the powder around the vent while the spectators make caustic remarks.

If the loose-weave cotton sash rope is soaked in a solution consisting of 500ml of hot water containing two table spoons of saltpetre and one table spoon of fine gunpowder this embarrassing situation should not occur. Do not be in a hurry, leave it to soak for a day or two to get the solution into the rope and not just onto it. Do not hang the wet slow match up as you will get a concentration of chemicals on the lower end, rather lay it flat until it is half dry and then hang it in the sun. Remember that you want it DRY inside and out, not WARM because it was in the sun for a while, just be patient and an embarrassing event will be avoided.

## THE CANNON IN MELKBOSSTRAND

The cannon registered as Durr 291 which serves as a memorial to the Battle of Blouberg stands in front of The Damhuis Restaurant in Melkbosstrand. The Damhuis, who are the custodians of the gun, requested CAOSA to refurbish both gun and carriage which were showing the effects of the weather since they were last treated 5 years ago. The work has been completed and thanks to Jurg the pictures and the history of both The Damhuis and the gun are on the CAOSA website – [take a look](#).

## UBIQUE