

THE CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

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An informative service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

[In a lighter vein, but still serious]

COMMITTEE EVENTS

Now don't go off the deep end, blow a fuse, lose your cool or go into a panic, but the Committee is slowly studying and reviewing the CAOSA Constitution with the aim of tabling a few proposals at the next AGM. We are not re-inventing the wheel – just adjusting a few spokes, replacing the valve and doing some wheel balancing – nothing dramatic.

One such proposal addresses and simplifies the present cumbersome system for proposing office bearers, another suggests that the Chairman elected must have served on the Committee for the past year in order to ensure some form of continuity.

The Committee is also investigating the desirability, benefits and legal ramifications of registering CAOSA as a non-profit organisation of one type or another. The findings will be promulgated to all members for comment before any action is taken in this regard. After all, this is **YOUR** organisation.

The Committee is also busy updating and improving the displays in the Gunner's Room at The Castle with a view to opening the office to the public on occasions. This would be in keeping with our promises made to Castle Management regarding our use of the space.

PROOF FIRING A CANNON

Many cannon should not be fired under any circumstances. Cannon that are heritage items which are connected with an historic occasion, bronze or iron cannon which have been in the sea for years are definitely not candidates for proof firing. Iron which has been immersed in sea water for a long time undergoes a deterioration which is not easily gauged by simple inspection and in bronze guns the iron spigots and the creuzetta corrode to a point where they form very weak spots in the otherwise healthy bronze.

The proof firing of a cannon is a significant and deliberate departure from the norms of safety that should be ingrained into the psyche of every gunner. This very necessary action is a calculated risk of destroying the gun, but should never endanger persons nor property. The desired outcome of a proof firing should be the knowledge that the gun can handle at least twice the chamber pressure that would be encountered in a normal firing.

The nature of normal firing is flexible and debateable, civil guns and field guns were proofed with a shot and a double charge ie, 2/3 shot weight of the appropriate powder, the naval requirement was for guns to be able to fire double shot or with bar shot for short range engagements against ships. Naval guns were sometimes proof fired with a double shot and a charge of ½ of a single shot weight.

Today we fire blank shots for re-enactments, commemorations, celebrations or just for the hell of it. Cannon proof fired by CAOSA are proofed for firing blanks unless the official documentation states otherwise.

The normal CAOSA proof charge is only double the weight of a prescribed blank charge and does not provide an adequate safety margin for the firing of any form of shot.

PROOF FIRING METHOD

1. Select an area that is distant from civilisation, devoid of any structures, fauna, heritage items, vehicles or other valuables.
2. If you are not sure that your carriage can take the additional strain, place the gun on the ground, preferably on grass or on some wood as stones or gravel will probably cause some scoring on the gun during recoil.
3. Aim the gun at as little as possible, with nothing but distance being the ideal.
4. Load the charge / wad / shot as approved by another Senior Gunner who is present as a witness.

5. Prime the gun with at least a 6 second length of fuse and ensure that the fuse is hanging downwards next to the gun. A spark from a vertical fuse will ignite itself lower down and the charge will go off before you can reach safety Yes ! I'm speaking from experience, luckily the gun behaved like a gentleman.
6. Make every attempt to record the firing on video so that you do not have the urge to watch what happens, also your next of kin can then see what led to your demise and so that the Committee has some evidence for use in the defence of CAOSA.
7. Warn any witnesses, check that the area is clear and safe, light the fuse and hightail it to your pre-selected safe position.
8. If nothing happens, then wait for at least five minutes before cautiously approaching the gun. Fuses can be notoriously unreliable time keepers.
9. If something goes bang, wait and listen for falling parts of a cannon before you venture out of your safe refuge.
10. If the gun is still whole and has no bulges or cracks, then you have proof fired it and you can now fire a normal specified blank charge with confidence.

PROJECT "CULVERIN"

The Cannon Association of South Africa had the privilege, with thanks to Ian van Oordt who sponsored the trip, to record, measure and study the bronze Portuguese cannons in the Natal Museum and those in storage. A paper based on this study was presented by myself at the International CPNS Conference held in Mossel Bay during August 2006, and it was clearly demonstrated by those present at the conference that these guns had great historical and research value to the international community. These cannon represent the oldest cannon in South Africa (C.1520) and are probably some of the oldest Portuguese cannon in the world.

Present at the conference were the Portuguese Consul, Dr Domingos Alvim, and a high level academic delegation from Portugal. They very diplomatically expressed concern that artefacts of such importance to the Portuguese contribution to the maritime history of South Africa were not preserved and on public display.

It is our understanding that the guns off the SANTIAGO are owned by the Natal Museum and that the guns off the SAO BENTO were the property of the Transkei Government, and are not the property of the Eastern Cape Government. It was made clear to us during our research in Pietermaritzburg that the Natal Museum was in favour of some Government department taking possession of the guns and removing them from their present unsuitable storage.

The professional cleaning and preservation, and the transport of such bulky and heavy items, would be an expensive exercise, but the rarity and condition of these guns would make the expense well worth the effort. The alternative of leaving them to deteriorate in storage is unthinkable. What could Chavonne Battery do with such a Portuguese display ?

NEW MEMBERS

Chavonne Battery Museum in the V&A Basin at The Waterfront has been steadfastly defending the BOE, The Clock Tower, the Swing Bridge and sundry stalls for several years and their 36, 24, 18 pounders and lesser flanking guns have been such a deterrent that none have been attacked by pirates, highwaymen or tax collectors.

CAOSA has fired cannon for Chavonne Battery on many occasions and they have now decided to join CAOSA. We welcome Dale Dogson and her crew in period costumes.

CAOSA WEBSITE

Readers are advised that upcoming events are publicised on our website at: **www.caosa.org.za**

UBIQUE

Gerry de Vries Chairman /Researcher