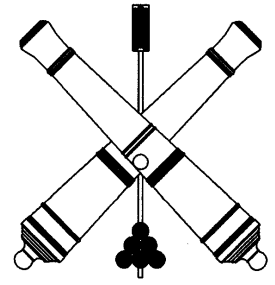


THE CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NEWSLETTER No. 30 - October 2008

A service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

THE MARTELLO TOWER & BATTERY

I was recently sent an interesting photograph of the Martello Tower and gun battery in Simon's Town which was taken in 1868. The photo shows three (four) 32 pdr cannon on cast iron front pivoted traversing platforms, three 18 or 24 pdrs on garrison carriages and one smaller gun, possibly a 9 pdr, placed to defend the left flank of the battery. I believe that one of these 32 pdrs is now in one of the Simon's Town Dockyard workshops.

This gun (Durr 409) is marked "CAB" on the left trunnion and 276 on the right and the weight is 55 – 0 – 0, or 2,8 tons. CAB is the mark of the Calcutts Works of Jackfield near Ironside in Shropshire where Alexander Brodie was the founder, hence CAB. According to my mentor, Rudi Roth, this gun was cast early in 1798 and proof fired at Woolwich in August 1798. This gleaned from the serial number and the proof records.

There are three identical guns still serving as bollards in the South East corner of the Dockyard from whence Durr 409 was removed. There were four 32 pdrs at the battery, there are four 32 pdrs in the Dockyard, these are the only four 32 pdrs in the country, the battery is 200m from the bollards and there are no 32pdr guns left at the battery. Mmmmm – I wonder ??

GUNSMOKE

I was requested, at very short notice, to fire a cannon for the start of an off-road cycle race for about 700 participants through several farms in the Bellville – Durbanville area. I took along a ¼ pdr on garrison carriage, the smallest gun available. The gun was aimed away from the participants and out into an open field and about 20m distant from the riders. At the signal I fired a 40g charge of FFG with a light foil wad. The cyclists who did not fall off their bicycles or become tangled with others got off to a good start. From the result I gather that a 9pdr or an 18 pdr would be out of the question.

Gerry deVries (jr) loaded and fired the 6 pdr Finbanker on Paarl Rock on 14 August for a cultural event. It was interesting to note that the gun, in its elevated position on the mountain, made a respectably loud noise which echoed off the mountains some 8 km away, and yet was hardly heard in the town directly below. Something to do with layers of warm and cold air?

Erick Kellerman entertained a crowd of about 50 people with the firing of 2 shots with his 8 pdr at Hessekwaskloof. Dr Dan Sleight of the VOC Foundation fired the first shot and Leslie Howard of Swellendam fired the second. We all retreated to Erick's "lapa" (a rustic shelter) where we drank MJ de Wit's excellent Signal Gun wine, ate well and chatted until late.

September has been the silly season for cannon firings. One at Chavonne Battery, two at De Grendel Wines, an 8 gun salute for the Community Chest, two guns at each of Durbanville Hills, De Grendel and Altydgedagt wine farms for the Season of Sauvignon Festival, one for a birthday, one on a mountain top for a 4 by 4 vehicle rally, 2 guns to open the new wheelchair route on Tygerberg and guns to celebrate Heritage Day on 24 September, one of which was fired by a member of the Durbanville Heritage Foundation.

A LESSON FOR GUNNERS

One of our members had to fire for a crowd of 100 plus onlookers. When he came to priming the gun he found that the vent was solidly blocked and he had to go through a lengthy unloading, drilling and cleaning exercise before he could fire. It appears that on a previous firing a chunk of the aluminium foil has been blasted up into the vent and was almost welded in place. Pre-firing checks can prevent egg on face !

CAOSA MEMBER PROFILE

Martin Venter, CAOSA member No. 1, is a Warrant Officer in the SA Navy and the owner of a 7 pdr RML of 200lbs on an original wrought iron naval service field carriage. Martin has participated in every CAOSA shoot since the association was founded. He has, on several occasions, started the Cape Town Gun Run, the Berg River Marathon and other similar events with his noisy 7 pdr. Not only did he manage to pinch membership No. 1, but he also steals the limelight with his snazzy blue uniform and his unique field gun and carriage.

Martin is one of the five Senior Gunners who have been selected for the Gunners Board, a sub-committee of CAOSA which will oversee all aspects of the safety, training, evaluation and classification of gunners and their activities.

CAOSA MEMBERSHIP

The Cannon Association membership has increased with the addition of Faans van Zyl of Pretoria as member number 97. With one resignation and the passing away of Jon Hall this leaves us with a current membership of 95 strong. It is interesting to note that we have two known Professors, four Doctors, a smattering of professional Engineers, a pilot, several retired senior military officers, three museum Curators, two holders of English titles and four owners of major wine farms registered as members. I have no idea what titles the remaining members may have.

The SA Police need not resort to building defences, only a small number of our members are prospective gunners, the majority are historians, researchers and amazed onlookers.

CENTRE FOR PORTUGUESE NAUTICAL STUDIES.

Dr Paul Brandt, the visionary, activist and sole driving force behind the CPNS has been forced to close the organisation down due to a lack of support for the concept. Paul and the CPNS have been active supporters of CAOSA and, although Paul remains a member of CAOSA, it is sad to see yet another heritage project die a lingering death due to apathy.

Gerry de Vries