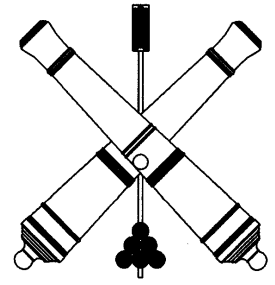


THE CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NEWSLETTER No. 28 - June 2008

A service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

MEN WHO INFLUENCED ARTILLERY

Jean-Baptiste Gribeauval (1715 – 1789)

As a young French Officer, Gribeauval was seconded to the Austrian Artillery from 1757 until 1762 where he was exposed to, and became familiar with the Liechtenstein artillery system. While in Austria he began planning his own version of an integrated artillery system which included the advantages offered by each of the Prussian, Liechtenstein and Valliere systems. On his return to France his concepts were regarded favorably by the Secretary for War who instructed Gribeauval to apply his ideas to the cumbersome Valliere system.

Gribeauval redesigned the field artillery to three calibres only, 4, 6 and 12 pounders and a single howitzer of 6½ inch bore. The traditional, but purely decorative mouldings were reduced to a bare minimum and the bores shortened to a standard of 18 calibre lengths. He retained the heavier caliber guns but relegated them to siege warfare only.

Gribeauval demanded a greater purity of metal for the guns and instructed that they be cast solid and then bored out, thus ensuring lighter, stronger and more accurate guns. He also made sweeping changes to standardize all aspects of artillery including carriages, equipment, sighting devices, tactics, drills and wagons.

ANOTHER PIECE OF HISTORY RESTORED

The 54 gun Dutch signal system that stretched from the Castle to Citrusdal in the North West and to beyond Swellendam in the East fired its last signal in January 1806 when the English landed at Melkbosstrand. The guns remained silent and fell into a state of disrepair because the Burghers in those areas were unlikely to react to a summons by the English occupiers.

The resentment regarding this apparently permanent occupation was so strong that it prompted men to move their families further inland to escape the English yoke by settling in areas beyond English influence. The Great Trek began.

An area commonly regarded as the first gathering point for the first "Trekks" was at Hessekwaskloof on the road to Swellendam. This area was also the site of one of the signal cannons, which has long since vanished.

Erick Kellerman, the current owner and custodian of the land, has, at considerable cost to himself and by endlessly badgering this writer, purchased an 8 pdr Dutch cannon on auction, fully restored it and replaced it in the Kloof.

On 17 May, in the presence of about 90 invited guests, the Mayor of Swellendam fired the first shot in the area since 1806, but none of the Burghers rushed off to defend the Cape, in stead all guests retreated by 12 km to the Stormsvlei Mall for a fantastic feast of wine and food prepared by a cook, not a chef. MJ de Wit, who could unfortunately not be present, sent a dozen mixed bottles of his excellent "Signal Gun Wine" which was handed out as souvenirs to selected VIP guests.

Erick followed an established Hout Bay tradition by having the 5 CAOSA members present drink a special toast to the gun with a very special form of liquid explosive. The bottle of liquid had a label depicting the Hessekwaskloof name and a picture of the gun, but no hazardous chemical or explosives warnings at all, just a small note regarding its use (diluted) for the instant restoration of seized tractor engines.

DAYS OF ACTION

The past two months have been pretty hectic for some CAOSA members with meetings, events and firings here, there and everywhere. Apart from the deafening three day Navy Festival, from which we have not fully recovered, there has been continuous activity.

On a single day, Saturday 05 April, Martin Venter fired his 7 pdr RML at Chavonne's Battery at the Waterfront to begin the epic journey of Morris Minors across Africa in celebration of 50 years of these little mobile roadblocks. On the same day Leon and Albert fired the 4 pdr at De Grendel for their cheese and wine day, Ian van Oordt had large crowds at three firings at the Castle and I was dragged off to Hessekwaskloof to proof fire Erick Kellerman's newly restored 8 pdr Dutch signal gun.

On 28 April, Freedom Day, our members fired a chain of 10 guns between Simon's Town and Chavonne's Battery at the Waterfront in Cape Town. There were an estimated 2,000 spectators at Chavonne and small groups gathered at each gun position. The Freedom Day message was brought to Cape Town by the guns firing sequentially at 15 minute intervals. A WW II vintage 25 pounder belonging to Cape Field Artillery responded to the signal which was then passed north by the 6 pdr at the Tygerberg Reserve.

Zane Palmer entertained the Heritage Society in Port Elizabeth with a talk on the 7 pdr RML and its role and distribution in South Africa. Zane is busy restoring two 7 pdr field carriages which he hopes to be able to use in the next battle re-enactment in Grahamstown.

Martin Venter and Alf Parris fired seven shots at Chavonne's Battery on 23 May in support of the SAPS seven days of action against violence toward children. Martin brought his 7 pdr field gun and Alf used the SAS UNITIE Trust 2 pdr which is kept at Chavonne.

On 24 May MC Heunis, who has moved from Pretoria to Bloemfontein, fired three shots with the 6 pdr BP&Co field gun at the Caledon Museum in Smithfield in support of the annual Bibber/Chill festival. A good time was had by all and the firing was shown on the TV news that evening. MC will no doubt be serving the gun at the Old Fort in Bloemfontein and the two guns which are fired for the witblitz (moonshine) festival in Philippolis. Maybe MC will let us know what a Bibber/Chill festival is ?

It is clear that CAOSA has a definite public service role to play, but the SAPS have yet to issue a gunpowder permit for a cannon. Those members who have permits obtained them for other black powder firearms and are obliged to "bend the law" by using the powder in cannons. All that we can do at the moment to justify this action is to quote "*Force Majeure*", or mutter the old expression, "*This I do because I cannot do otherwise*". Let's hope that we make bail !

ALERT - STOLEN GUNS

Two bronze ½ pdr cannon have been stolen from a guest house in the Somerset West area. These guns are well known to us and we would dearly like to have them returned to their owner.

The guns have a KG III crest in relief on the second reinforce, they are 760mm long, have a bore of 42mm diameter and weigh in the region of 63kg each. The guns were stolen but the carriages were left behind, possibly a scrap metal exercise. It is unlikely that a scrap dealer would send such valuable items to be melted down for the metal, they may have been sold on to an innocent buyer.

Say nothing, listen to rumours and let me know when you hear anything, because somebody will hear something sooner or later.

CAOSA AGM

The Cannon Association held the AGM at De Grendel wine estate on 24 May. There were 23 members present as many apologies were received from overseas and up-country members. The existing Committee was re-elected under the dubious guise of giving them a second chance to fail. The Committee consists of Jacobus van Niekerk - Chairman, Barbara George – Treasurer, Jurg Zimmerman – Member, Johann van Zyl – Member and Gerry de Vries as the Secretary / Scribe.

ANOTHER CANNON FOUND

Mary Patrick, Director of Cape Archaeological Survey, contacted CAOSA regarding a cannon which was unearthed during excavations for the new stadium in Green Point. We were requested to identify the cannon and provide some insight into why it would be where it was found.

Alf Parris and I went and identified the gun as an 8 pdr iron Swedish Finbanker as used by the Dutch Admiralty and the VOC. The site was on the Green Point Common where there was a horse racing track and a large British encampment during the Boer War. There are photographs in the Archives in Cape Town which show several upright cannons used as bollards at the old race track and tales of British units which used some old cannon to decorate their Regimental HQ.

The gun may be used as a decorative element in, or at the new stadium.

Gerry de Vries June 2008