



# CANNON RESEARCH & PROJECTS

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## NEWSLETTER No. 69 - November 2019

Thank you to all those who responded positively to my last newsletter, fear not I have not lost my marbles or deserted CAOSA nor have I gone far away. It was nice to hear again from friends who have been silent for years and to share their reminiscences about the "good old days". We probably should not try to repeat or revive the "good old days", we should concentrate on making future days even better: and I am confident that the present CAOSA committee could do that.

The purpose of the CR&P newsletter is to encourage communication between people with an interest in muzzle loading cannon, membership of CAOSA or any other grouping is not a requirement and the purpose is definitely not to hang anyone's dirty laundry out in public. CAOSA, SABRE, OVSAC, NCS and other organisations are welcome to re-distribute or to extract articles from the newsletter for republication as they see fit.

**CAOSA News** - Our young Chairman, Frikkie Conradie (5 months younger than I am) suffered a minor stroke but is displaying good gunner characteristics by bouncing straight back into action. We wish him a speedy and complete recovery. Frikkie must be recovering pretty quickly because he had a very successful firing early on November 9<sup>th</sup> for the start of a mountain bike endurance race.

**SABRE News** - I heard from Debbie Mills in Grahams Town that Basil is still up to mischief and pressing on with youth training and making a noise in his blacksmith shop. They have promised to be more forthcoming with their news.

**NCS News** - Had a long chat with Erick Kellerman at Nitida Cannon Station and he has updated me on their plans for the future which looks bright and full of activities. They are becoming very closely involved in the community and have had several shoots for local charities. Their plans must be big: they have ordered several kilometres of slow match, a variety of prickers and pricker stowages, several linstocks and a handspike.

The NCS crew have designed and ordered a new display board; it shows and explains all the loading and firing equipment used by gunners. This board will be added to their first display of the Call-up System which stands near the guns. The battery is starting to look like an outdoor museum.

They have also become the custodians of a 9 pounder RML field gun, which unfortunately deprived Chavonne's Battery of one of their exhibits, but the gunners wanted it where it could be fired at will. Poor Will. (Whoever that might be!).

**HOUT BAY News** - This was one of the great success stories with the locals bringing the entire East Battery back into operation. They had great firings which involved ambassadors, High Commissioners, NATO and other dignitaries involved in high profile publicity events which were all very good for Hout Bay. I often heard the expression "This is Hout Bay, we do things differently" which was all very Hout Bay-esq and cute but the rising and setting of the sun, the ebb and flow of the tides, the laws of gravity and the SAPS rules and regulations for the control of explosives must not be ignored nor tampered with.

I would like nothing more than to see the Hout Bay batteries return to their former glory. Leave the politics alone, get the guns working and the politicians will come to you. All that is required is the will to make it happen.

**OVSAC News** - I have put out feelers to MC Heunis but he has yet to respond.

**CR&P News** - Just like CAOSA - trying to identify a purpose and mission for the future.

When Jonathan Hall and I started recording and identifying cannon in November 1994 our broad, but undefined aim, was to prevent the loss of cannon through the scrap metal trade. There were cannon lying all over the Cape, on mountains, in the moat of the Castle, in back yards, at abandoned gun batteries and on street corners. When the City Council or one of their contractors unearthed cannon they invariably ended up in a scrap yard. We would approach such destroyers of our heritage and through sometimes dubious means obtain the cannon for placement at a selected historical site. 1046 Cannon later there are no more lying waiting to be scrapped, people have learned that these are relics of value greater than that offered by scrap yards.

CR&P has manufactured 68 carriages to better present cannon with some dignity and much loading equipment for those which still make a noise, but this kind of work is tapering off as the requirement

has been largely satisfied: the mission as Jon and I defined it has been largely completed - so what is the current mission of CR&P?

As I see it, the current mission of CR&P is to continue disseminating information about cannon, to provide communication links, to encourage cannon maintenance, to act in support of any cannon related activities and to snipe away at any argument which makes no sense whatsoever.

One target for my sniping is the expression "Fire under the CAOSA banner". I have asked what exactly that means and I get various answers from different people. Some say that it is when a firing takes place which was booked through the CAOSA Committee. Some say it is when the firing arises via the website which is paid for by CAOSA. Others say it is when you wear the entire CAOSA uniform for the firing, some say it is when a firing is not private but is open to the public and some say it depends on who is paying for the firing. Hoo Boy! There may even be combinations of the above and more complex explanations.

All I know is that the expression has led to arguments, animosity, frustration, accusations and has spoiled friendships and all for absolutely nothing.

As I see it any firing done by a CAOSA qualified gunner in accordance with the CAOSA Code of Conduct is done "under the CAOSA banner" (Whatever that might mean) regardless of where the request originated, who requested it, who is paying for it and who was attending the firing and what the gunner was wearing. If you were trained, examined and qualified by CAOSA, any firing that you do is in keeping with the rules and spirit of the CAOSA Code of Conduct is just that – a CAOSA firing! What alternative type of firing is there? Misfire? Oh shut up!

### **A BIT OF HISTORY**

In them old days it was common practice for the victor to retain the weapons and equipment of the vanquished. After the battle of Muizenberg, but before the Battle of Blouberg the English exported a quantity of Dutch arms and equipment back to England as war trophies. Ian van Oordt has found a reliable reference to the English exporting 180 tons of war materiel to England in 1803. It must be assumed that that 180 tons was made up largely of ordnance; probably mainly bronze pieces.

We know that the Dutch had many older bronze guns at the Cape, but they are not here today, and the Cape never had a foundry capable of melting such large pieces of bronze, so this increases the probability of them having been exported.

A search through the English records of the Dutch guns currently in the UK shows only a small number of guns and many of them were cast later than 1803.

It is likely that the captured guns were stored in the Grand Storehouse at the Arsenal in London where a large number of captured bronze pieces were stored. The storehouse suffered a major fire in 1841 with the flames visible for miles around and the heat so intense that the integrity of many guns was compromised, and when the tower collapsed into the fire many guns softened by the heat were badly damaged.

Most of these damaged guns were melted down to cast the vast amount of ordnance required for the Crimean War. It is possible that many old cape Dutch guns ended up in Crimea in the form of English bronze field guns.

**On a personal note** I am an honorary member of CAOSA and thus not liable to pay CAOSA subs, but I am going to pay the R100 in any event because I believe that CAOSA will rise from the doldrums and become what it should be. Come on! - join me.

UBIQUE,

Gerry de Vries: Researcher

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