

= Blowing from a gun =

Blowing from a gun was a method of execution in which the victim is typically tied to the mouth of a cannon and the cannon is fired . George Carter Stent describes the process as follows :

The prisoner is generally tied to a gun with the upper part of the small of his back resting against the muzzle . When the gun is fired , his head is seen to go straight up into the air some forty or fifty feet ; the arms fly off right and left , high up in the air , and fall at , perhaps , a hundred yards distance ; the legs drop to the ground beneath the muzzle of the gun ; and the body is literally blown away altogether , not a vestige being seen .

Blowing from a gun was a reported means of execution as long ago as the 16th century , by the Mughal Empire , and was used until the 20th century . The method was utilized by Portuguese colonialists in the 16th and 17th centuries , from as early as 1509 across their empire from Ceylon (modern day Sri Lanka) to Mozambique to Brazil . The Mughals used the method throughout the 17th century and into the 18th , particularly against rebels .

Arguably , the nation most well known to have implemented this type of execution was the British Empire , in its role as paramount power in India , and in particular as a punishment for native soldiers found guilty of mutiny or desertion . Using the methods previously practised by the Mughals , the British began implementing blowing from guns in the latter half of the 18th century , with the most intense period of use being during the 1857 sepoy mutiny , when both the British and the rebelling sepoys used it frequently .

The practice is said to have been exceptionally used in Afghanistan in 1930 , against 11 Panjshiri rebels .

= = Rituals = =

A commonly reported method of blowing a man from a gun is to tie him in front of the muzzle of the gun and then have him shot . Loading the cannon with an actual cannonball is on occasion reported ; but , more commonly , the use of blank cartridge or grapeshot is attested . The following description of the manner of tying up the convicted is from Afghanistan , 7 July 1839 , ordered by Shuja Shah , during the campaign against Dost Mohammad Khan :

The three men were then tied with ropes to the guns , their backs against the muzzle . The rope , fastened to one of the spokes of the wheel , passed with a knot round the arms , over the muzzle of the gun , round the other arm , and then to the spoke of the opposite wheel , which kept the body fixed .

Although immobilizing a victim in front of a gun before firing the cannon is by far the most reported method , a case from Istanbul in 1596 alleges that the victim was actually put into the gun and executed in that manner . Some reports exist that attest that on occasion , people were fastened to rockets and blown into the air . This is said to have occurred for a Brahmin under Hyder Ali 's reign (1761 ? 1782) , and also , in an 1800 treason case , in the Maratha Empire .

= = Problems with the method = =

Things did not always work out according to plan at such executions ; at a mass execution at Firozpur in 1857 , there was an order that blank cartridge should be used , but some loaded with grapeshot instead . Several of the spectators facing the cannons were hit by the grapeshot and some had to amputate limbs as a result . In addition , some of the soldiers had not been withdrawn properly and sustained damages by being hit by whizzing pieces of flesh and bone . In another case , a soldier who was to be shot managed to fall down just as the shot went off , with the resulting scene taking place :

One wretched fellow slipped from the rope by which he was tied to the guns just before the explosion , and his arm was nearly set on fire . While hanging in his agony under the gun , a sergeant applied a pistol to his head ; and three times the cap snapped , the man each time wincing from the expected shot . At last a rifle was fired into the back of his head , and the blood poured out

of the nose and mouth like water from a briskly handled pump . This was the most horrible sight of all . I have seen death in all its forms , but never anything to equal this man 's end .

Others reported with shudders how birds of prey circled above the execution place and swooped down to catch pieces of human flesh in the air , while others were nauseated by the dogs loitering about the place of execution and rushing to the scene to devour some of the " delicacies " spread around as a result of the execution .

= = Mughal Empire = =

Blowing from a gun as a method of execution has a long and varied history on the Indian sub @-@ continent , and many reports from the mid @-@ 18th century and onwards testify to its varied use . The execution method was used during rebellions and as punishment for a variety of crimes . Here , a focus is chosen upon the Mughal tradition of blowing from guns as a local tradition preceding , for example , the British tradition on the same sub @-@ continent .

Several historians note that blowing people from the guns as a method of execution was an " old Mughal punishment " on the Indian sub @-@ continent . Just prior to the institution of the reign of the first Mughal emperor , Babur , his son Humayun is said to have blown from guns 100 Afghan prisoners on 6 March 1526 , in one incident of his father 's many struggles against the Lodi dynasty . During the latter half of the 17th century , members of the Jat people in Northern India rebelled and raided against the Mughal Empire , and the emperor Aurangzeb is said in one account to have ordered one of their leaders blown from a gun . Purbeel Singh , said to have been the last Hindu chief of Umga , close to Aurangabad in today 's Bihar state , was reportedly taken by an unnamed Mughal emperor to Aurungabad , and blown from a gun . The Sikh rebel Banda Singh Bahadur was finally vanquished in 1716 by the emperor Farrukhsiyar , and after his execution , Banda 's son was ordered to be " blown to bits by a cannon " .

While the preceding cases are examples of rebels or military adversaries being blown from guns , the Mughal era also contained a few examples of using this form of execution for other types of perceived crime . For example , in a rather anecdotal story from the times of Jahangir (r . 1605 ? 1627) , the emperor had six mullahs blown from guns , for having consented to , and given approval of , the forcible abduction and marriage of a Hindu girl to a Muslim officer . In 1714 , thieves were a severe annoyance to a marching army ; a trap was made , and two thieves caught by the concealed guards were later blown from guns . During a siege in 1719 , the problem of deserters was eventually solved for the commander of the Mughal army by blowing four deserters caught in the act from guns , in presence of his troops .

= = Portuguese Empire = =

Portuguese colonialists are , in several accounts , charged with having used blowing from a gun as a form of capital punishment in many of their colonies . A short review follows :

= = = Sri Lanka = = =

The Portuguese explorer Francisco de Almeida is reported to have blown many individuals from guns at Ceylon , around 1509 . During the Dutch siege of Colombo in 1656 , the city population endured extreme famine . One nursing mother became so starved that her production of milk stopped , and her infant was dying . She chose to kill it , and eat it . Once the Portuguese general became aware of her act of cannibalism , he ordered her blown from a gun , but in this particular instance , the clergy and the principal citizens dissuaded him from carrying out the act .

= = = Mozambique = = =

During explorer Francisco Barreto 's 1569 ? 73 campaign in Monomotapa , he at one time imprisoned some 50 Muslim individuals , and had them " impaled , blown from mortars , torn apart

on tree @-@ trunks , axed or shot " . In mid @-@ 18th @-@ century Tete , in north @-@ western Portuguese Mozambique , the capital punishment for slaves are said to have been to be blown from guns , and , in the first decade of the 19th century , it is reported that an inveterate raider chief was caught by the Portuguese and blown from a gun .

= = = Brazil = = =

In 1618 Brazil , native resistance against the Portuguese was unshaken , although a leader of them , Amaro , was taken prisoner and blown from a gun .

= = British India = =

= = = Before 1857 = = =

Blowing from a gun as a method of execution was used , perhaps most well known , by British troops during the Indian Rebellion of 1857 . The British , however , had a long tradition prior to the 1857 rebellion of executing sepoys found guilty of mutiny or desertion in this manner . According to one historian , the British tradition began in 1760 , when the government examined the modes of capital punishment in use . In the district of the 24 Perganas , it was found that the common military mode of capital punishment was flogging to death . Regarding blowing from a gun as an old Mughal punishment , the government opted for this technique , as being , relative to death by flogging , more deterrent , more public and more humane . Already in 1761 , orders were given in Lakhimpur " to fire off at the mouth of a cannon the leader of the thieves who was made prisoner , that others may be deterred " . Technically , in cases of court @-@ martial , it seems that until 1857 the courts were composed of native officers rather than British , but it is added : " although they are presided over , and generally led and ruled , by the superintending officer , whose duty , however , is merely to transcribe the evidence , and assist the native officers with advice and counsel " .

In March 1764 , a subedar (native officer) thought to entice his troops over to the enemy ; he was court @-@ martialed and blown from a gun in front of the troops . In September the same year , major Hector Munro executed 24 or 25 " ring leaders " who caused a battalion to desert (the desertion being on account of " lack of rewards " , " scarcity of provisions " and problems with climate and disease) . Approving of the execution , one commenter said : " no disposition to mutiny was thenceforth manifested " . In 1775 , a commandant Muctoom Sahib incited his men not to embark for Bombay . Muctoom Sahib was blown from a gun , and the men embarked to Bombay without causing more trouble for the British . In 1782 , mutinies broke out in Bardhaman and Barrackpore . Three mutineers were sentenced to death by the court in Bardhaman , 2 of whom to be blown from a gun , the last to be hanged . In the Barrackpore trials , 4 of the 5 on trial were sentenced to be blown from a gun , while the last was to receive a thousand lashes and " to be drummed out of the cantonments with a rope around his neck " . During the Third Anglo @-@ Mysore War (1789 ? 1792) , six regiments mutinied over arrears of pay and held their officers confined . When order was restored , two of the most active were blown from guns . Not only mutineers were blown from guns , but also soldiers found guilty of desertion , as is shown from a few cases in 1781 and 1783 .

Not only sepoys were executed by being blown from a gun . In 1798 , mutiny broke out in the British unit 1st battalion of the Madras artillery . One British soldier was condemned to be blown from a gun . This , however , seems to have been exceptional , and one historian says that the soldier Forster is the only European on record to have been blown from a gun by the British authorities .

In 1804 , during a military engagement , the troops under lieutenant Birch 's command refused to quit the ground of their encampment . Colonel Burn deemed harsh measures were necessary , convened a court @-@ martial , and two of the officers involved were blown from guns and 9 others " severely flogged " . With full approval of the action , the writer observes : ? a measure which , there is every reason to believe , had the best effect , as the corps behaved during the subsequent siege

with the greatest steadiness and propriety ? .

In the 1806 Vellore Mutiny , beginning with a night massacre of British officers and soldiers , with many sepoys killed during the suppression , 6 individuals were sentenced to be blown from the guns . In 1812 , a plot was discovered at Travancore to kill the European officers ; two ring leaders were blown from the guns , and several others were hanged . In 1819 , six deserters who had joined the ousted rajah of the annexed Kingdom of Nagpur were apprehended by the British and were blown from the guns on 7 February . In 1832 Bangalore , a conspiracy allegedly designed to exterminate all Europeans was discovered . Out of some 100 implicated , 4 were sentenced to be blown from the guns , two others to be shot .

Sometimes , although a person was condemned to death , he might hope for a pardon or a commuting of the punishment . In 1784 , a regiment mutinied over lack of pay . Lieutenant General Laing suppressed the rebels and ordered twelve to be blown from guns . The last of the twelve was very lucky , however : Bound to the cannon 's mouth , he had to endure three times that the fuse burnt out . He then asked Lieutenant General Laing whether he was really destined to die in this manner , and Laing chose to pardon him . In 1795 Midnapore , 5 sepoys were condemned in court @-@ martial to be blown from guns on account of mutiny , 3 others to be hanged . Their cases were appealed , however , and their sentences were commuted to be dismissed from service instead . In the 1824 mutiny at Barrackpore , occasioned by the resentment of sepoys to being shipped to the front in the First Anglo @-@ Burmese War , four days after the bloody suppression of the mutiny , one of the leaders , Bindee Tiwarree of the 47th regiment was found hiding , disguised as a faqir . In the ensuing court @-@ martial , he was condemned to be blown from a gun , but instead he was hung in chains , and after his death his body was placed in a gibbet for a few months . In 1836 , a sepoy was found guilty of having fled before the enemy and abandoned his European officers . Rungish was condemned to be blown from a gun , but the sentence was commuted into " transportation beyond the sea " .

= = = The Great Rebellion = = =

To appreciate the scale and frequency of the executions made by the British during the 1857 insurrection , one may , for example , look at the reports of incidents given in merely a single journal , " Allen 's Indian Mail " , for the year 1857 .

On 8 June , two sepoys from the 35th light Infantry were blown from guns . 10 June , in Ludhiana , Peshawar , some 40 from the 54th regiment were blown from guns . On 13 June , ten sepoys from the 45th Regiment at Ferozpur were blown from guns , two hanged . The same day , in Ambala , 10 sepoys from the 54th regiment suffered the same fate . The 26th of the same month , in Aurungabad , 1 was blown from a gun , 1 hanged , and 3 were shot . On 8 July , in Jhelum , it is assumed that captured rebels would be blown away . On the 19th , Aurungabad , 1 was blown away , 2 shot . On 5 September , Settara , 6 were blown away . On 17 September , Multan , 1 was blown away , 121 were summarily executed . On 23 September , in Karachi , 1 was blown away , 7 were hanged and 20 deported . (The local body count on court @-@ martialled individuals then came to 4 blown away , 14 hanged , 22 deported and 3 beheadings .) At the end of October , in Rohilkhand near Agra , 1 was blown away . On 16 November , Bombay , two sepoys from the 10th regiment were blown away .

As an example of official statistics , rather than a collection of newspaper reports , in an 1859 paper to the House of Commons of the United Kingdom on the rebellion in the Peshawar Valley in the Punjab , for the period May ? September 1857 , 523 were recorded executed , of them 459 shot by musketry , 20 hanged (13 for desertion) and the last 44 blown from a gun . Of those 44 , 4 were executed on charges of desertion , rather than mutiny . Official July ? November statistics for the area about Agra says that of 78 who were given capital sentences , two had their sentence commuted into imprisonment , whereas 4 were blown from guns . Other official statistics , this time from Indore , state that , of 393 sepoys officially punished , 32 were executed , 21 of them by being blown from guns .

The preceding cases are examples of execution after formal court martial , and do not , therefore ,

record deaths as occurring during battle or during informal executions or massacres .

Several British were convinced that the sepoy insurgents had blown British women from guns . A specific case , mentioned by several sources , concerns that of Mr. and Mrs. Birch , Mrs. Eckford and Mrs. Defontaine , all of whom were said to have been blown from guns at Fatehgarh .

= = = After 1857 = = =

The Rebellion of 1857 was not the last time that British military used blowing from a cannon as an execution method . In 1871 , for example , 65 members of the Sikh sect Kukas or Namdhari were executed by the military , by being blown from guns .

= = Afghanistan = =

Within Afghanistan , a tradition of using blowing from a gun as capital punishment is attested from the early nineteenth century up to 1930 . Some examples are following :

= = = Early cases = = =

In 1802 , the forces of Mahmud Shah Durrani inflicted a crushing defeat on the Ghilzai tribes , and to discourage further aggression , he ordered one leader and his two sons blown from guns , as well as building a minaret out of Ghilzai skulls . In 1803 , when Shah Shujah Durrani ousted his half @-@ brother Mahmud from power , he revenged himself on an ally of Mahmud , Ashik , by blowing him from a gun for having captured by means of treachery Shujah 's and Mahmud 's half @-@ brother Zaman Shah Durrani , who had been king of the Durrani Empire prior to having been ousted by Mahmud in 1800 .

= = = The iron emir , 1880 ? 1901 = = =

In 1880 , Abdur Rahman Khan became emir of Afghanistan , and he swiftly gained the nickname " the iron emir " for his perceived brutality and strong rule . For example , one source estimates that , during his 20 years on the throne , an average of 5 @,@ 000 executions a year took place , several by blowing from guns . For example , in December 1889 alone , 24 are recorded as having been blown from guns , and many others executed in other ways .

= = = Tajik reign of terror , 1929 = = =

In January 1929 , a new cycle of extreme violence broke out in Afghanistan when the Tajik Habibullah Kalak?ni became emir . The British minister Humphreys wrote : " None was safe , houses were pillaged indiscriminately , women were ravished and a reign of terror was established unprecedented in the annals of bloody Afghan history " . Political opponents were often blown from guns or executed in other ways . Habibullah 's regime was toppled in October 1929 , and then the Kuhestani Tajiks were persecuted . An article in The New York Times from 6 April 1930 was headlined with : " Eleven Afghans Blown from Guns at Kabul " .

= = In fiction = =

In Flashman in the Great Game , written by George MacDonald Fraser and set during the 1857 Indian Rebellion , Harry Flashman , a British Army officer who is impersonating an Indian , is knocked unconscious and captured during a British attack on the camp of Rani Lakshmibai . Flashman is assumed to be a rebel and awakens gagged and tied over the muzzle of a gun . He narrowly manages to avoid execution and has the rebels who were to be executed alongside him freed , an uncharacteristically humane act for a character usually portrayed as a liar , a bully and a scoundrel .

