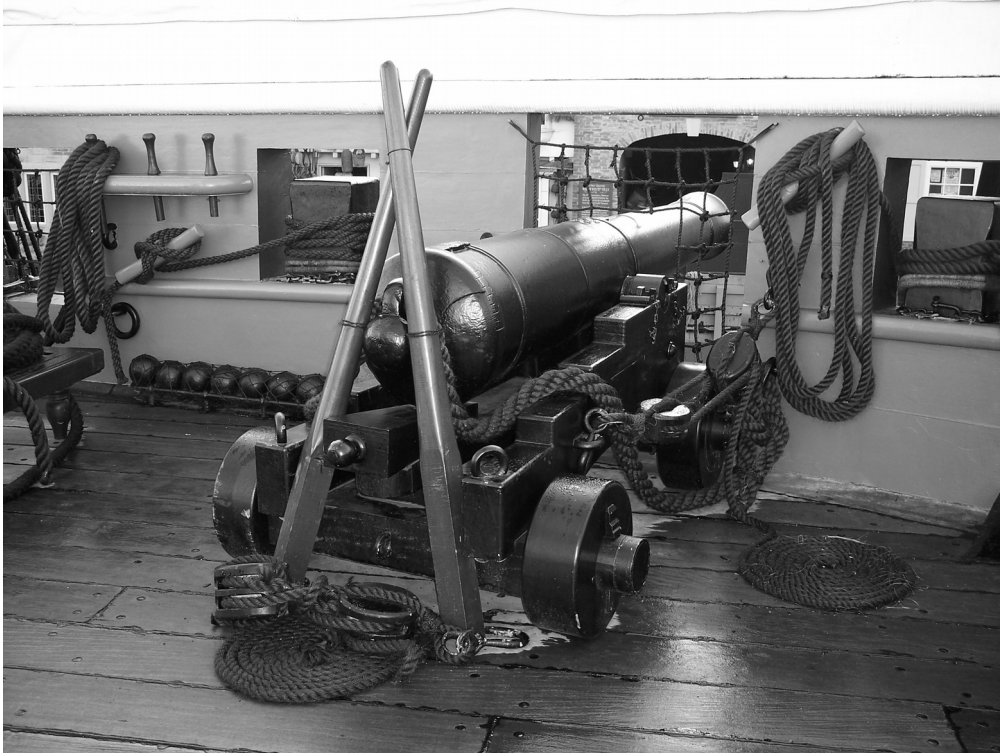


How to Fire your Cannon



HOW TO FIRE YOUR CANNON



With the warning, do not try this at home, and the disclaimer that the editor takes no responsibility for loss of life and limb, the following is based on the second edition, 1829, of 'A Treatise on Naval Gunnery' by Howard Douglas.

Each gun battery was led by a captain of the gun who both gave commands and pointed the gun. The other men were equally divided being placed each side as right hand and left hand men. The first man on the right sponged and rammed down the cartridge, the first man on the left receiving the cartridge from the powder man who fetched it during the action. The last man on the right wore a small apron, with a pocket to hold spare flints and some old linen for cleaning the lock. Two gunner mates in each battery were provided with bags containing a stock and bits, four gimlets, one screw driver, two spare locks, spare line for trigger pulls and more old linen.

The guns were loaded when the ships were out of harbour and the exercise begins according to this supposition.

Repair to quarters - The powder men proceeded to the gunners store to fetch the powder horns, tube and cartridge boxes, the last two men on the right fetched the locks and the other men repaired to their respective guns.

Take out your tampions cast loose your guns - The first man on the right took out the tampion, and the captain of the gun oversaw the casting loose of the gun, securing it against the ship's side by hitching to the cascabel both tackle falls which he then gave to the second man right to hold.

Prime your gun - The captain of the gun then laid hold of the priming wire with his right hand, pieced the cartridge, took a tube out of the tube box, tore the cap of the tube and introduced it into the vent. He then took the priming horn in his right hand, opened the pan on the lock with his left, filled it with powder, shutting it quickly.

Point your guns - The captain of the gun placed himself to the right of the train tackle, his right leg stretched backwards, his left hand upon the base ring of the gun and his right hand on the handle of the pointing wedge or quoin. The third man, assisted by the fourth for heavy guns, took up the hand spike and the iron crows, placing them upon the steps of the carriage to raise or lower the breech, as directed by the captain of the gun, until the gun had a proper degree of elevation.

The same men then placed the hand spikes and crows under the cheeks of the carriage, loosened the tackle falls handing them to the men placed nearest to them to keep the gun hauled tight to the port. The captain of the gun then cocked the lock, took hold of the trigger line in his right hand, and moved back quickly beyond the recoil of the gun. He pointed the gun, stooping and placing his eye in a line with the chase sight and the breech ring. Having pointed the gun the captain gave the command - 'To your posts' - upon which the men withdrew the hand spikes and crows, and fell in holding them upright so that the trucks would not run over them when the gun recoiled.

Make ready with the lint stock - The rear man on the left laid hold of the lower end of the lint stock, placed himself on a line with the hind axle tree, facing the port hole, stooped, in order to blow on the match, then held it within four inches of the base ring of the gun ready to fire the moment the captain of the gun gave the word, if the lock should fail.

Fire - the captain watched for a favourable time to fire, when the moment came he made a signal and pulled with a jerk, the trigger line. If the gun did not go off and he thought the direction was still good he would give the command 'fire'. Upon this the man set fire to the tube with the lint stock, withdrawing quickly, and the men who had hold of the tackle falls let them go taking care that they were not in the direction of the trucks.

After firing, every man, except the first right and left, moved quickly to the train tackle, hooked it on the crupper, and hauled upon it if the gun should not have run in sufficiently. The last man on the left fastened the train tackle with a clove hitch and preparations to load the canon commenced.

Glossary:

- Breech ring - ring on rear of cannon
- Cascabel - the part behind the base-ring of a cannon
- Crows - large iron bars
- Gimlets - hand held tools for boring holes
- Sponge - 'Sponge', a swab for a cannon
- Tackle falls - ropes attached to the cannon
- Vent - touch-hole passage in cannon



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