

Proctor Cannon Firing Halted By National Park Policy!

When asked, in a recent meeting with the Senate Appropriations Committee, how arrangements for the Proctor Cannon inspection and use agreement with the 2nd Battery Vermont Light Artillery were coming along, **Mr. John Hall**, the Governor's Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Community Development, responded that his agency was trying to contract an inspector. He also stated that **he felt that the cannon would be found in sound condition, but "I am unlikely to recommend it ever be fired again. All the policies out there say don't do it."** He then bolstered the statement by showing the lawmakers a National Park Service policy piece that said only reproduction weapons should be fired at demonstrations.

So what do we reenactors know about National Park Policy? We know that it can be a fickle thing.

In 1991 the Living History Association was involved in a dispute with the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. The Division sought to stop having reenactments at Vermont State Historic Sites, claiming that the additional traffic stressed the Division's resources and the sites themselves. They also claimed that the recreations were dangerous and unscholarly in their approach to history. At that time, the statement was made that "reenacting has no value and misrepresents history." They also cited that the National Park Service does not allow these types of events. But the truth is more complex than the argument they presented. That is why in the end, they lost the argument.

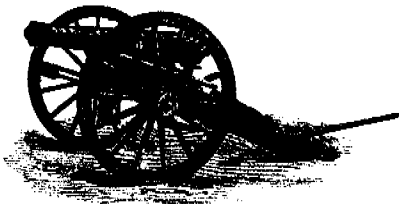
The National Park Service deals with in excess of 10,000 visitors a day at their assorted parks. They also deal with hundreds of assorted special activity or special interest groups of visitors each day, of which reenactors represent only one small segment. The Park Service is controlled by its largest division which is their Natural Parks Division (Yellowstone, Death Valley, etc.). The Historical Parks are smaller and their employees are generally not the place where major policies for dealing with the public originate from. They also have hundreds of their own volunteers, plus part-time summer or seasonal employees and then thousands of regular staff. **Hence to avoid confusion, the National Park Service has a "say no" policy.** Changes and compromises in policy *can* be made at the discretion of a Park Superintendent with the understanding that it is their job and their pension that they are putting on the line. But by giving their senior employees this option, they are also recognizing the fact that these general rules don't provide all the answers all of the time. That is why National Park Service Rules state that there will be no opposing forces at their sites, but at Saratoga Battlefield there are opposing forces every year who fire at each other with blanks on an oblique (to partially satisfy the rules). It is also why at Guilford Courthouse the National Park observes their no reenactment policy by allowing the reenactors to camp in their park, while the state park, which is right next door, allows a full-scale battle. The state and federal parks promote the event as one activity for the visitation benefit of both. The policy is really to support the educational mission of the parks while allowing Park Superintendents to exercise reasonable and safe control over activities.

National Park Rules are very strict for reenactor newcomers. They are never allowed opposing forces of any kind. They are not allowed to bring in any ammunition of any kind. They are each issued one cartridge for each firing demonstration and are inspected thoroughly before and after each event. But if you have become a known commodity to the personnel in charge, all those rules can be changed, a little more after each year's performance, until you are treated like one of the family. **While Mr. Hall has stated that the National Park Service doesn't allow original cannons to be fired, please read the letter on the next two pages to discover how inaccurate that statement can be.**

BATTERY B, FIRST RHODE ISLAND LIGHT ARTILLERY, INC.

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The Gettysburg Gun, July 8, 1863.

April 16, 2007

Senator Diane Snelling
304 Piette Rd
Hinesburg Vt. 05461

Dear Senator Snelling

Allow me to introduce myself my name is Phil Dimaria I am the Commanding officer of Battery "B" 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery. We are a Living History organization (reenactors) which is part of the State forces in Rhode Island. Because of our historical link to the 103rd Field Artillery R.I. National Guard we are treated like part of the unit. We participate in all functions, and ceremonies that the Guard is involved in, and we are under the direct command of the Governor and the Adjutant General.

I was asked by James Dassatti, who I consider one of New England's top historians, to write you with some information that might be of some help to you. This is in reference to testimony that was given during a recent hearing in which a statement was made to the fact that original artillery pieces are damaged by blank firing and that even the National Parks do not allow original artillery pieces to be fired. Although the NPS does not fire their own guns they also do not protect them from the elements, hundreds of cannon are out in fields where the acid rain is slowly eating them away. With that said the fact that they do not allow original pieces to be fired is not true. During any weekend at the National Park in Gettysburg Pa. Living History groups such as mine and Mr. Dassatti's volunteer their time to put on quality programs, where original artillery pieces and small arms are fired in demonstration for the public. Thousands of people flock to these programs for with them they receive the full American experience, the sights, the sounds, and the smell of what it must have been like for those Americans who gave us what we hold so dear today our land of freedom.

My organization, Battery "B" 1st R.I.L.A., is one of the groups of volunteers that have fired original artillery pieces one which we own and one that is on loan to us from the State of R.I. Firing demonstrations that we have put on at Gettysburg National Park, Springfield Armory National Park, Martin Van Buren Historical site, Harper Ferry Historical site to name a few, all of which are National Parks. In these demonstrations we fire under strict safety rules many of which were established by Mr Dassatti and the members of the 2nd Battery Vt. Light Artillery . The powder charges we use are much smaller than that which was used during the Civil War, and

HAZARD'S AND BROWN'S BATTERY

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without a projectile being used there is no dangerous pressure being built up so there isn't a chance of damaging the gun. What it amounts to is a giant fire cracker.

If you would like check our credentials feel free to contact Major General Robert Bray The Adjutant General R.I. National Guard tel. # (401) 275- 4102, John McCabe Springfield Armory National Park tel. # (413) 734-8551 ext. 232 email John_MacCabe@nps.gov, Tom Holbrook Head of Historical Interpretation Gettysburg National Military Park tel. (717) 334-1124 email Thomas_Holbrook@nps.gov. If you have any other questions please feel free to email or call at (401) 647-5130 thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Philip DiMaria
Captain, Commanding Battery "B" 1ST R.I.L.A
Historical Unit to the 103rd Field Artillery Brigade
Rhode Island Army National Guard

HAZARD'S AND BROWN'S BATTERY

Mr. John Hall, the Governor's Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Community Development concerning the Proctor Cannon has stated, that while it is likely the cannon will be found in sound condition, "I am unlikely to recommend it ever be fired again."

Are you saying that regardless of the engineering, regardless of the science, regardless of the metallurgy, regardless of the care, regardless of the stewardship, if it is old, it is unsafe and shouldn't be fired?

"Let us not make a decision based on the facts, rather let us follow the principles of one man, or one agency. Let us blindly give up our collective, and individual rights to the unfounded principles of a misconceived blanket government policy, instituted by lobbyists, and outside pressure groups to satisfy the government's need to be right in all things. That doesn't sound like the Vermont that I grew up in." James A. Dassatti, Captain, 2nd Battery Vermont Light Artillery.

The 2nd Battery has offered a cooperative effort to the VMM&L both verbally and in writing since 2001, which has not only never been responded to, but has never been acknowledged

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