

Chapter 8 - Shot & Shell Practice

As well as drilling on board, *Cerberus* regularly “Left the Bay” (Hobson’s Bay), or “Went Down the Bay” (down Port Phillip), for shot and shell practise.^A During the 1875 Royal Commission on the Volunteer Forces, Captain Panter was asked how often the men practised with the turret guns. He answered once every six weeks in summer and once a quarter in winter. Asked whether this was enough he replied, “that is more than is allowed in the Imperial ships”.¹¹⁶

When the second damaged gun was removed from the ship in 1898, it had fired 207 rounds. Given that there were four guns, *Cerberus* was therefore firing an average of 32 rounds each year.

A recurring problem with shot and shell practise from the 10 inch guns on *Cerberus*, was that the target was often destroyed by the first shot, as was the case on the 13th of February 1874.

A further problem was that of manning levels. It took 34 men to man each turret, i.e. 15 men and one powderman per gun. Of the 15 men for each gun, seven were inside the turret and nine men were outside the turret (i.e. inside the shield deck). Also inside the turret was the Captain of the turret with the Second Captain outside.¹¹⁷

FORE TURRET – Turret Captain (inside turret)
Second Captain (outside turret)
LEFT GUN
INSIDE TURRET – Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7
OUTSIDE TURRET – Nos. 8 – 15 & Powderman
RIGHT GUN
INSIDE TURRET –Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7
OUTSIDE TURRET – Nos. 8 – 15 & Powderman

Table 3 - *Cerberus* Fore Turret Crew

^A A shot is a solid projectile intended to pierce armour. A shell is hollow & contains gunpowder & is intended to explode either on contact or after a pre-set interval determined by a fuse in the shell’s nose.

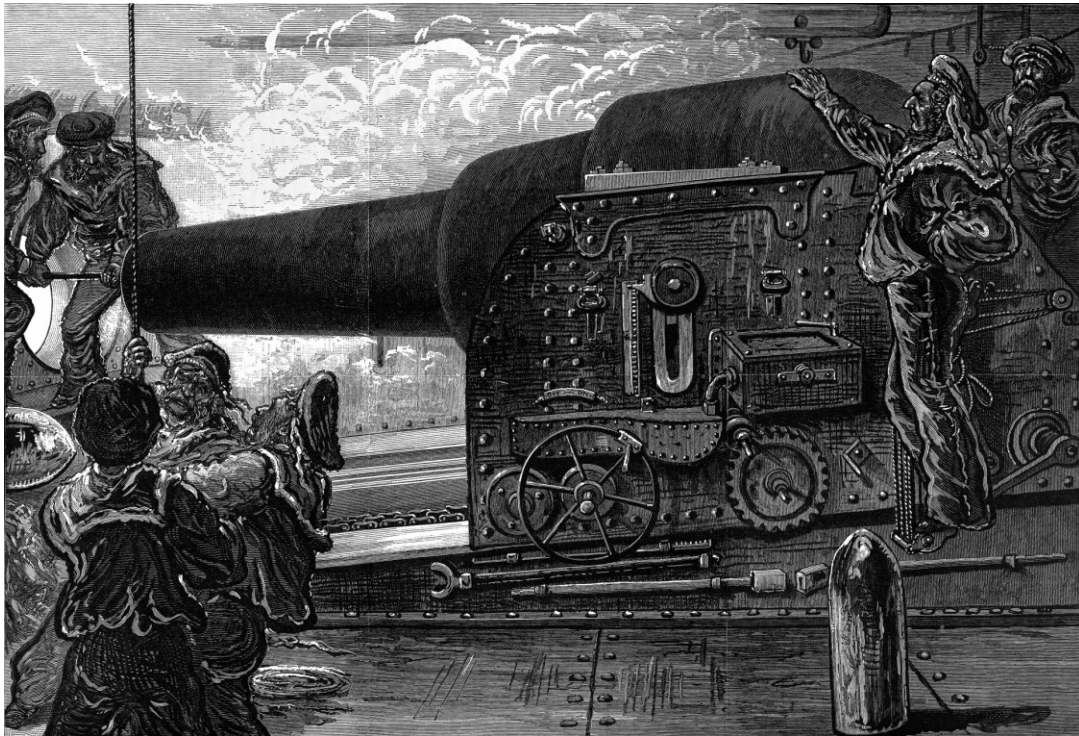


Figure 38 - Inside the Turret of the *Cerberus*: “Load!”

Top left: Nos. 3 & 4. **Bottom left:** Nos. 5, 6 & 7. **Far right:** Nos. 1 & 2.

The Australasian Sketcher, 9 June 1877, State Library of Victoria.

With all of the other manpower demands of running the ship, the manning level allowed by the government in the 1870s meant that often only one turret could be operated.

Captain Panter pointed out these manning problems to the Volunteer Commission in 1875. He stated that given the *Cerberus* crew listed in Figure 39, he could only work one turret. This could only be achieved by using 23 Petty Officers and men from *Cerberus* and 14 men plus two officers from *Nelson*. Of the 40 boys^A listed, only nine were strong enough to perform some of the less important duties outside the turrets.

^A After initially serving a three month probation period, boys as young as twelve could choose to sign on for five years service in the navy. The case of John Hayes in 1873 showed that the Supreme Court was prepared to enforce the five year contractual period.

No.	Rank.	Pay.			
		Per Annum.		Per Diem.	
		£	s.	d.	
1	Captain	500	0	0	—
1	Chief engineer	360	0	0	—
1	Engineer	182	10	0	—
1	Chief gunner	225	0	0	—
1	Gunner	180	0	0	—
1	Assistant paymaster	164	5	0	—
1	Shipkeeper (Success)	136	17	6	—
33	Petty officers, seamen, and stokers	2,800	9	6	6s. 6d. to 2s.
40	Boys	610	3	3	1s. to 1s. 6d.
	Total salaries	5,339	5	3	
	Provisions, &c.	2,995	0	0	
	Total cost of ship	8,334	5	3	

Figure 39 - *Cerberus* Crew & Maintenance Cost in 1875

One problem was the inability of the Naval Reserve men to practise in the *Cerberus* turrets. This was eventually remedied, when in 1888, practise turrets were set up in Port Melbourne and Williamstown.

Accident in the Turret

“An accident occurred on board the *Cerberus* on Saturday afternoon, to an able seaman, named John Snelling about 30, living at Williamstown. He was at gun exercise, when one of the guns, which was being run out, jammed his leg between the carriage and the buffer. The left leg was smashed, and Snelling was taken to the Melbourne Hospital, where the leg had to be amputated.”^A

The Argus, 2 September 1872

^A John Snelling initially received a compensation payment of £50 and a job with Victorian Railways which paid £1 8 shillings per week. In 1878 he received a further payment of £100.

The *Cerberus* Earthquake – 1875

“One of the severest earthquakes ever recorded in Melbourne was experienced this evening. The first shock occurred at the Observatory about a minute before 9h. 7m. 55s, when the second shock was observed; about a minute after this a third shock was noticed; at about 9h. 10m. 5s. a fourth shock happened, and the fifth shock was felt at 9h. 11m.”

The Argus, 6 August 1875

The Supposed Earthquake

“The shocks referred to in yesterday's paper as those of an earthquake have proved to be due to the reverberations of sound from the guns of the *Cerberus* at Point Nepean.”^A

The Argus, 7 August 1875

Practise off the Quarantine Grounds – 1877

On Wednesday the 15th of August 1877 Captain Mandeville had a small topgallant sail taken ashore, and erected in front of the sandstone cliff between the quarantine ground and Point Nepean. *Cerberus* then anchored 3,800 yards (3.5 kms) off shore and fired ten studded rounds from each turret at the target.



Figure 40 - Corroded Mk I Studded Common Shell.

Photographed courtesy of Parks Victoria.

Whether or not the shell shown in Figure 40, which was found at Cheviot Beach in 1985, was one of the eight shells fired in August 1877, will never be known. Overshooting the Mornington Peninsular during gun practise could explain how it got

^A Point Nepean is approximately 56 kms in a straight line from Melbourne.

there. The results of the August 1877 shot and shell practise can be seen in Table 4. The gun crews were obviously highly skilled.

FORE TURRET		
1	Shot a few yards to right of target, elevation good	Lieutenant Heathcote.
2	Shell burst a little in front, and struck target	T. White, No. 1.
3	Shot a little high to left	R. Williams, No. 1
4	Shot hit the target	R. Williams, No. 1
5	Shot high to left of target	F. Martin, No. 2.
6	Shot just over target, very good shot	T. White, No. 1
7	Shot high, a little to left	J. Lawson, No. 2.
8	Shell burst on target, splendid shot	Lieutenant Heathcote.
9	Shell very high; direction good	Lieutenant Heathcote.
10	Shell high, burst in cliff; direction good	Lieutenant Heathcote.
AFTER TURRET		
1	Shot a little short, direction good	Mr. Tubb.
2	Shot a few yards to right, elevation good	M. Neville, No. 1
3	Shell knocked target away	M. Neville, No. 1.
4	Bad shot, tube hung fire	J. Ovendon, No. 1
5	Shot a little high to left	J. Ovendon, No. 1
6	Shot short, ricocheted over cliff	M. Proctor, No. 2
7	Shot high to right	J. M'Neill, No. 2.
8	Shell burst on remains of target, completely burying it	Mr. Tubb.
9	Shell a little high, burst where target had been	Mr. Tubb.
10	Shell short, direction good	Mr. Tubb.

Table 4 - Shot & Shell Practise in 1877

The Argus, 20 August 1877

“Dividing the firing into four classes, it may be said that six shots were first class, seven second-class, three third class and four fourth class. Any of the first three classes would, however, have struck a vessel, while one of the fourth class shots failed, owing to the tube hanging fire.”