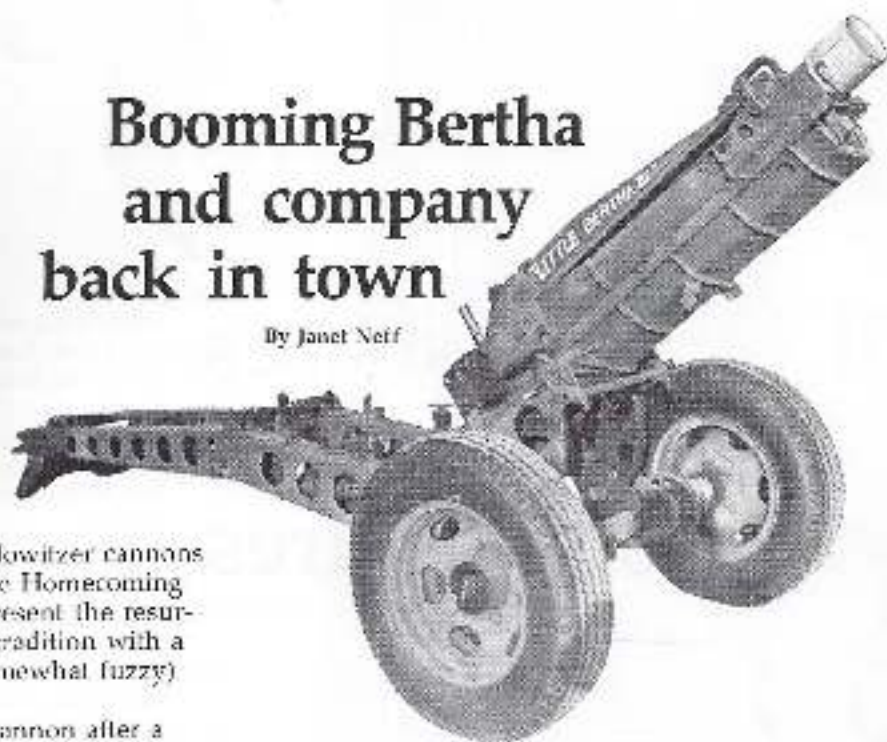


Booming Bertha and company back in town

By Janet Neff



The six 75mm Howitzer cannons that boomed at the Homecoming football game represent the resurrection of a UTA tradition with a long (although somewhat fuzzy) past.

The firing of a cannon after a football score has been initiated often as a spirit booster—ever since the early 1940s when a salute cannon, dubbed Little Bertha, reportedly belloved fire and smoke at parades and football games.

Her keepers were members of the Bull Pen Society, commuter students who were responsible for promoting school spirit when UTA was North Texas Agricultural College.

But Bertha's description varies slightly. Some say she was a carbide, muzzle-loader. Col. Joe M. Hill ('43) remembers the two-foot-long cannon shouting 20-gauge shotgun shells. "She made a powerful lot of noise," he recalled.

Regardless of her firing action, she garnered attention. Other college students were always trying to steal her, particularly those from John Tarleton Junior College in Stephenville, NIAC's arch rival.

"It was like stealing the Baylor bear," said Hill.

Sometime during World War II, Bertha disappeared. Some say she blew up, but others contend she was stolen.

After the war, a second Bertha showed up thanks to Hill who was collecting weaponry in Germany after the fall of the Reich.

In 1947 Hill had Bertha II bronzed and donated it to the military science department in honor of Lt. Russell Carrico and Lt. Constance

Mims, friends of Hill who served as NTAC cadet colonels before the war.

The Bull Pen members again took over as cannon guardians, but this time the organization was comprised of cadets.

In 1972 Bertha II also disappeared or, as Hill put it, "some rascalion stole it."



Several months ago, the current UTA cadet commandant Capt. Ron Munden heard that a surplus of "pack" Howitzers had been found in the far East. He requested six of them.

The oldest was dubbed Little Bertha III.

"She's ours," said Munden, noting that the other five are on a one-year loan, although he has requested permanent custody of the big boomers.

That, he says, would give the military science department the only full salute battery between Fort Sill and Fort Hood, allowing use not only at UTA games, but also at any official ceremony requiring the military 21-gun salute.

As for Bertha III's safety, the Bull Pen also has been resurrected and is responsible for her maintenance and safety. But it will take a hefty thief to haul Bertha away since she weighs about 1,400 pounds.

The new acquisition also has inspired a search into the cannons' history. Munden wants to clear up the discrepancies about the muzzle loading versus shotgun shell cannon and find Bertha I's origins.

"We named this one Bertha III, but there may have been one or even two other cannons in there," said Munden, who has assigned the Bull Pen cadets the task of being Berthas' genealogists.

Any alumni with information about the cannons has been asked to contact Munden at (metro) 273-3281 or write him in care of UTA.