Cannon Blast Kills Youth Camp Councelor



The cannon salute during the evening flag ceremony had been a special event at the youth camp for three years, and it was an honor for a camp counselor to be selected to light the cannon. So the 16-year-old youth felt proud as he stood beside the cannon and attempted to fire it. But his pride turned to embarrassment as the wind blew out the touch stick – twice. The ceremony proceeded without the salute and everyone went inside for dinner. But the camp counselor remained behind to see what went wrong. His friend, another counselor, stayed with him to help.

After several tries, the two finally added a small amount of black powder to the cannon's touch-hole. They repeatedly pushed a 4-foot-long lighting stick close to the touch-hole. It worked. When the cannon exploded, its breech burst into pieces. The friend was spun around by the blast's force. But a large portion of the breech hit the 16-year-old counselor in the forehead, knocking him to the ground unconscious. He died in a hospital four days later of a traumatic injury to the brain.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Procedurally, many things. For one thing, written procedures – specifically for misfires – were not available for the counselors to use as a resource. Also, the cannon had not been inspected for signs of stress. But the main error was that only qualified adults, not youth, should conduct any task that involves the use or handling of explosive materials.