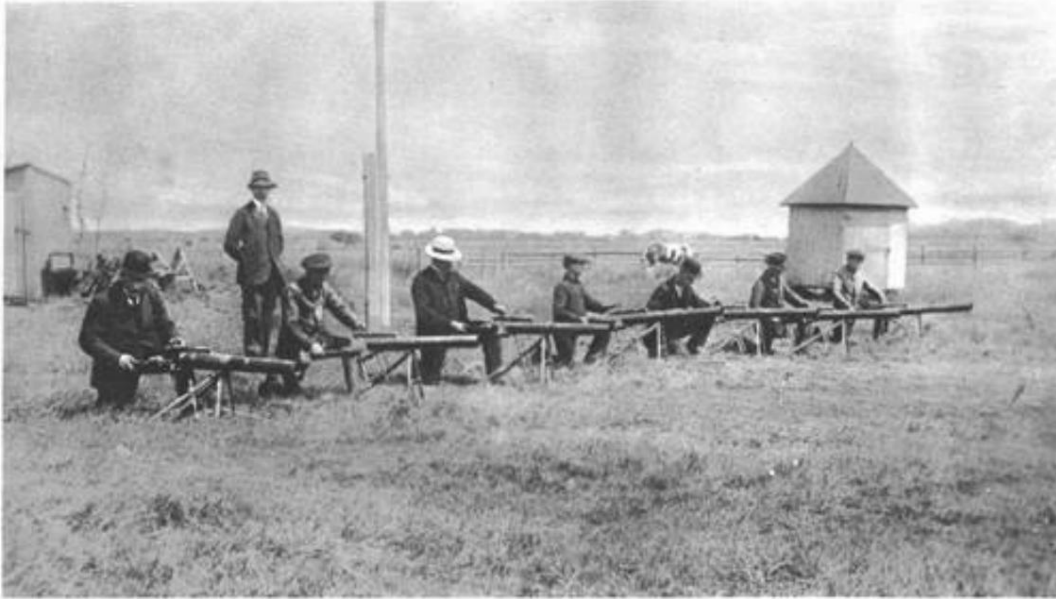


Aasen hand grenade howitzers

Introduction

Apropos the mention of the Copenhagen County Rifle Corps 8 pcs. Aasen "hand grenade howitzers" in Scrapbook - Cycling soldiers I found the reproductions shown here quite by chance in The Illustrated War News, Part 21, December 30, 1914 (Project Gutenberg).

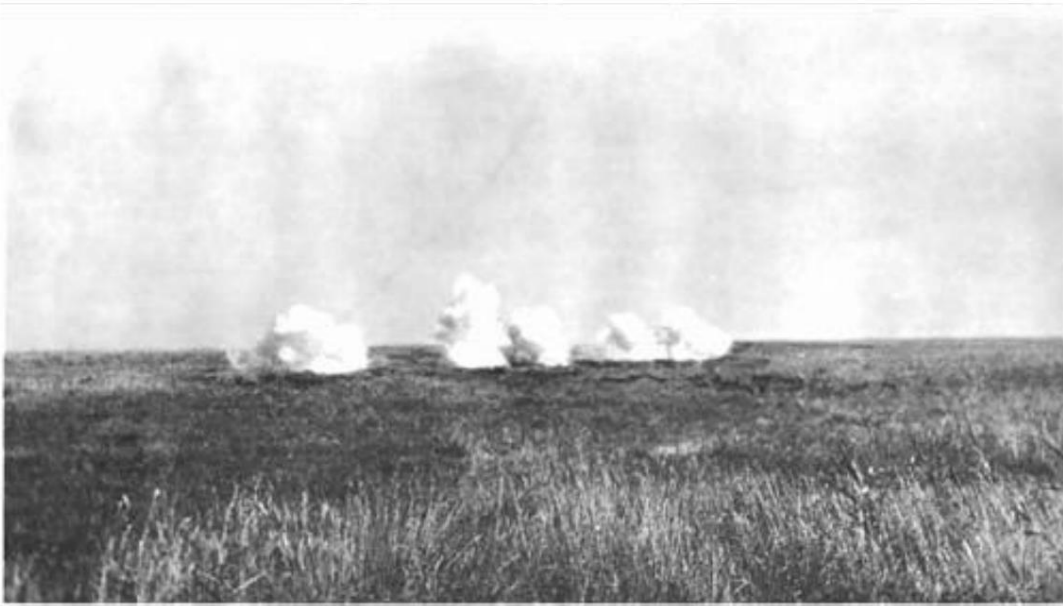
The pictures



Hand-grenades shot from a gun! The Aasen grenade-gun being loaded.

"...we give a photograph of a Danish experimental gun, designed at Copenhagen, for firing Aasen hand grenades. The grenades are shown in the act of being introduced into the breech of the weapons, and the apparatus for holding each grenade in the hand is clearly shown."

It is reasonable to assume that the man behind the firing line is engineer Aasen.



Hand-grenades shot from a gun! Aasen grenades burst in the open.

"...the shells are seen bursting at a certain distance from the firing point."

Closing

The Illustrated War News brings the pictures in connection with a mention of the use of hand grenades in Northern France and Flanders, and the first experiments with various catapults for launching hand grenades etc.

So it seems that a Norwegian engineer was quite far ahead with these projects, even though, as far as is known, nothing more came out of the case in Denmark than the 8 pamphlets in the Copenhagen County Rifle Corps.

Per Finsted

About Engineer Aasen - Apropos to Aasen hand grenade howitzers

Introduction

A friendly reader of Chakoten's website, Svend Aage Kegel, has provided the following information about Engineer Aasen, who turns out to be a Norwegian engineer.

Engineer Nils Waltersen Aasen [(Wikipedia)]

Nils Waltersen Aasen (born 30 March 1878 in Stadsbygd in Rissa, died December 1925 in Wisconsin, USA), was a Norwegian weapons designer, inventor and non-commissioned officer. He is considered the inventor of the modern hand grenade and land mine.

Aasen graduated from the Fort Artillery NCO School in 1903. He began his experiments with the development of a hand grenade while serving as a sergeant at Oscarsborg fortress. The work was encouraged by the commandant at Oscarsborg, former defense minister Georg Stang, who was keen to strengthen and modernize the defense in view of a possible future conflict with Sweden. The Norwegian Ministry of Defense was not interested in Aasen's prototype. Aasen then formed Det Aasenske Granatkompani in Denmark, which until the First World War produced and exported the hand grenade in large numbers all over Europe. In addition to new types of explosives, trench mortars, aerial bombs and land mines, he also developed several inventions with civilian applications, but it was weapons development and production that brought him great income and honors.



Bracelet grenade.



Pétard mounted on racket.

Just before the First World War, Aasen developed a powerful anti-personnel mine, the automatic soldier, intended as a deterrent weapon. This invention aroused enthusiasm among the French military, but did not go into production until the war. During the First World War, Aasen was given responsibility for the production of hand grenades for the French army. He had 13 factories and 13,000 workers in operation throughout the war.

In 1917, Aasen's hand grenade was also acquired by the Norwegian army, under the condition that he himself was responsible for paying the production rights. As thanks for his efforts, Aasen was promoted to conscript first lieutenant in the artillery.

The illustrations are an excerpt from a postcard - *En 1ère Ligne* - bought at Fort Douaumont, Verdun [1](#)). —

Aasen's fortune was greatly reduced due to unfortunate financial speculations and the fact that he had not taken care to get a patent for many of his inventions. He died of tuberculosis in 1925 in Wisconsin, USA while seeking American funding.

Aasen received many honors and medals for his inventions. Among other things, in 1915 he was appointed an honorary colonel in the French Army and a knight of La légion d'honneur.

About Aasen hand grenades in the Norwegian army

The Norwegian counterpart to the textbook for the army's privates - *Soldatens Bok* - published in 1916 and "prepared according to the measures of the Defense Department" mentions the following about the "Aasengranate", as it was called. The hand grenade must thus have been introduced a little earlier than stated above.

... The hand grenades now most commonly used for infantry have a weight from something under $\frac{1}{2}$ up to 1 kg. For the fortress artillery, heavier shells are used. Of modern hand grenades, the "Aasengranaten" must be mentioned, designed by the Norwegian sergeant, now an engineer, Aasen. This grenade has gained widespread use due to its good effect and is thrown using a wooden shaft inserted into the grenade and equipped with a control screen. It is worn in a loop (= a strap) on the belt...

Closing

It must therefore be established that the name in my articles was stated incorrectly, and thus not spelled with r, as otherwise stated in the sources for the articles Aarsen hand grenade howitzers and Utklipsark - Cycling soldiers.

The above source reference is to the Norwegian edition of Wikipedia. There is also an English language version of the same article; here reference is made to the Guide to the Archives of The Norwegian-American Historical Association, whose archives contain a (newspaper?) clipping and a brochure from engineer Aasen's American company Aasen Corporation of America, Stoughton, Wisconsin.

I thank Svend Aage Kegel for his kind assistance in the matter.

Per Finsted

Notes:

1) See the entire postcard in my article Uniform descriptions - France, 1916-17. The possible direct relations of the illustrations to the Norwegian-invented hand grenades are not known; they are mostly intended alone as illustrations of French hand grenade launchers.