

Coast Artillery Living History Ft. Hancock, NJ

On 13-15 October 2017, the National Park Service (NPS), in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) and other historic organizations, hosted the annual "Fort Hancock Days". This event commemorates the formal renaming of the "Fortifications at Sandy Hook" (also known as the "Military Reservation of Sandy Hook") as "Fort Hancock" by the US War Department on 30 October 1895. The Fort was named in honor of MG Winfield Scott Hancock, a US Army hero of the American Civil War. The entire Sandy Hook peninsula constitutes the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark.

The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Callum Bujdos, Peter Bujdos, Paul Casalese, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Joe Di Giovanni, Chris Egan, Richard King, Henry and Mary Komorowski, Anne Lutkenhouse, Eric Meiselman, Tom Minton, Chris Moore, Mike Murray, Steve Rossi, Paul Taylor, Wally Tunison, Gary and Deanna Weaver, Shawn Welch, and Bill Winslow. Our guests included John Uhler and Steven Uhler.

The educational focus was interpreting the Coast Artillery mission at Fort Hancock in the World War Two-era, specifically 1943. The tactical focus of the event was the ongoing U-Boat war, and the threat of saboteur activity or the shelling of Fort Hancock by submarines using deck guns. The event addressed the operation of the Advance Harbor Entrance Control Post ("HECP") Number 1, which was located at Fort Hancock on top of Battery Potter, and the role that Battery Gunnison/New Peck played as Advance HECP #1's Examination Battery. A key element in our interpretation were the 13 separate times that the battery fired upon ships entering the harbor which failed to follow the instructions of the HECP.

The photo below shows the majority of the participants on Sunday, 15 October with Gun #1, a M1900 6-inch rifle serial number 23 manufactured at Watervliet Arsenal, in Albany, NY in 1903.



Preparation work began as AGFA members arrived on Thursday afternoon (13 Oct). Below, PVT Tunison and SSG Weaver pause for a few moments as they begin to open the Machine Shop.



Below SGT Egan sweeps the magazine entrance area in preparation for the Friday night Lantern Tour.



In addition to brooms, CPL Cusano uses our shop vacuum to remove dirt and leaves in the Powder Passage leading to Gun No. 1.



A major improvement in the Battery has been the new Machine Shop table. Notice the size and weight of the table. It not only supports the three machines, but has shelving for eight tool boxes, a drawer for the lathe parts, and a large vise to the left of the drill press.



The photo below shows the shell magazine cleaned and ready for the Lantern Tour. About 168 inert (safe) 6-inch projectiles are currently stored inside the shell room.



The powder room is also cleaned and readied for visitors. 295 powder cans are stored in the magazine. The large wooden boxes are used to store our mess equipment, latex paint materials, and hand tools.



The National Park Service has been hard at work improving Battery Gunnison/New Peck. The two covers below are for the foundations of the new Battery Commander's Station Stairs, which will be installed soon.



“Chow” is served at the Battery on Friday nights. Below, SSG Weaver stirs our stew in preparation to feeding our members before the lantern tour.



Below SSG Weaver, PVT Tunison, 2LT Cusano, 1LT Lutkenhouse and 1LT Taylor enjoy our stew. The dinner was prepared on a 1940 Coleman 500 Speedmaster stove, using a 1944 Army 20-man cooking pot.



Our team chats and prepares for the evening's program as we finish our dinner at the base of Gun #1.



Final preparations include issuing individual items, finalizing our orders, and helping new members configure their field equipment such as cartridge belts and canteens, to the Army standard.



At about 1730, we gather the team outside of the plotting room for final instructions prior to moving out to our starting locations for the lantern tour.



Below 1st SGT Murray reviews our key history items in the Field Order with PVT Tunison, 1LT Taylor, PVT Bujdos and CPL Cusano as final preparations continue.



Our members and guests pose for the photo just before the tour team departed for the Post Guard House (Bldg #28).



Below 1st Sgt Murray and LTC Welch lead the tour team down the Multi-Use Path, between Battery Gunnison /New Peck and the Battery McCook/Reynolds - the Mortar Battery, or in 1943, the Harbor Defense Command Post (HDCP). To the right is our guest, CPT (Chaplain) John Uhler - a much welcome addition to our team for the evening. As always, we wondered how many guests we would have, and what the evening would bring.



Inside the protective wall of the HDCP, we pause for a photo at the base of a former fire control tower. The center cement block was a column to support fire control instruments in the top of the tower.



We had some thirty visitors waiting for us prior to the start time of 1830. Here, LTC Welch provides a historic overview by setting the narrative of 1943 prior to starting the tour.



Below, LTC Welch and team begin lighting the lanterns for the tour.



Our tour started at 1830 hours. Below, the tour group of approximately 80 visitors, learns about the bowling alley in the basement of the Post Exchange from SSG Minton.



In the photo below, our visitors and the team move into the southern emplacement of the former Mortar Battery. This was one of four such emplacements in the Battery.



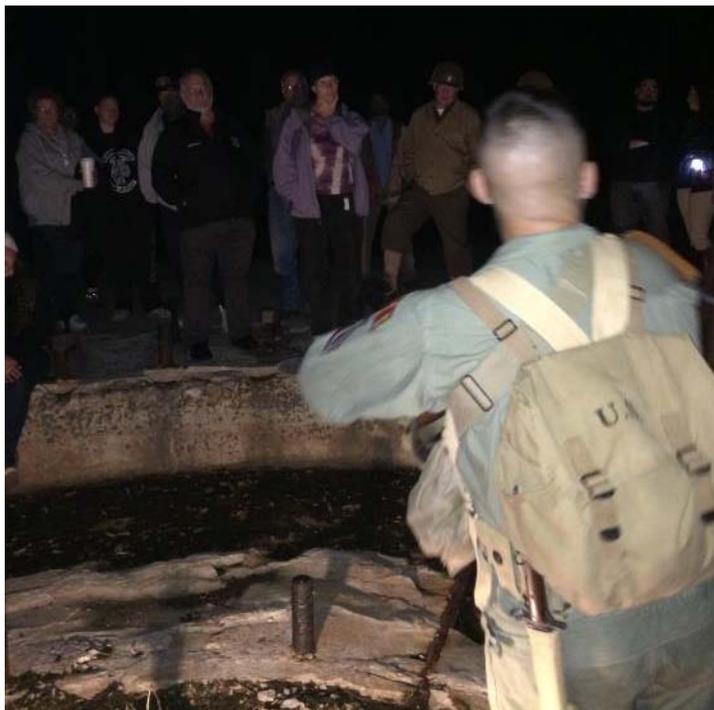
Inside the emplacement, we discussed the functions of the HDCP as well as outlining how the 12-inch mortars that were emplaced here functioned. The 16 M1886 cast iron 12-inch mortars, mounted four per pit, were all removed by 1921.



The size of the tour group while inside the emplacement can easily be seen in the photo below. The popularity of the Lantern Tour is shown by the high number of visitors. Once we departed the HDCP, we split the tour into two groups. One group took the short tour route directly to Battery Gunnison/New Peck. The other group took the long tour route, which included the Harbor Entrance Command Post (Btry Potter), the Sandy Hook Proving Ground, and the 14-inch gun turret test block. The long tour arrived at Battery Gunnison/New Peck as the short tour was wrapping up and departing.



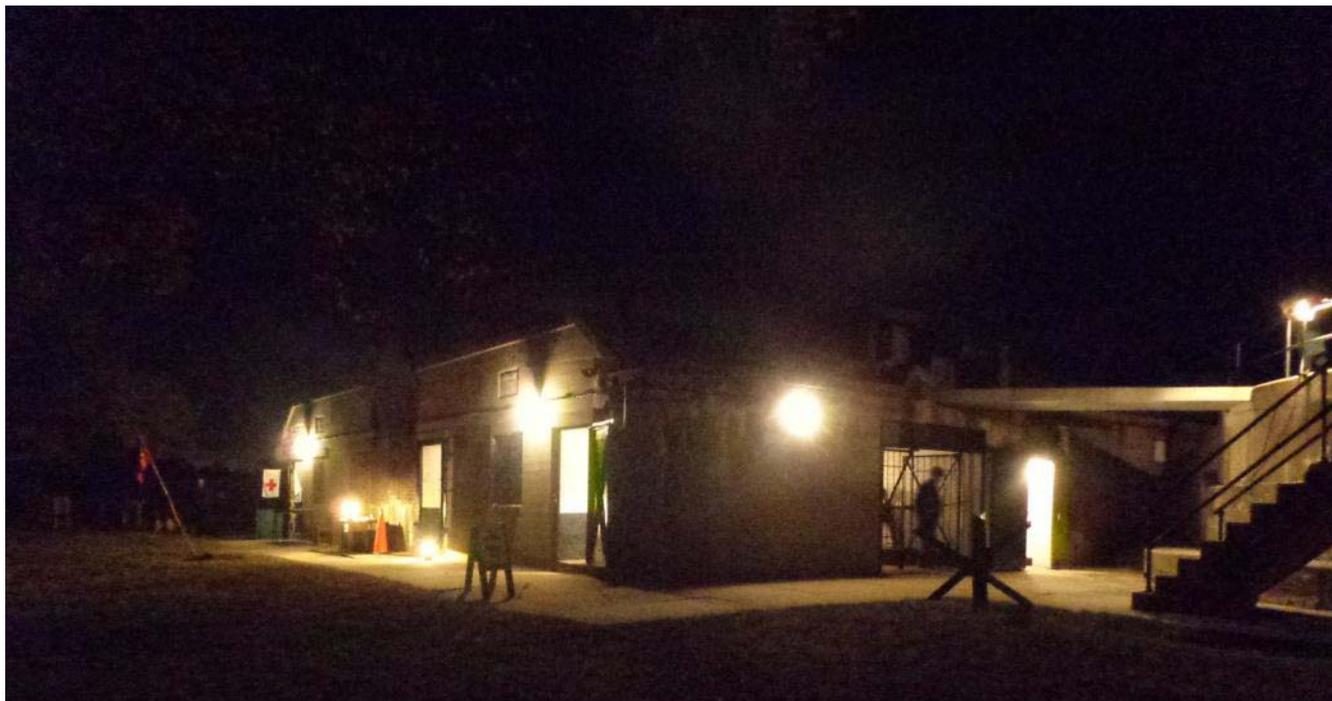
The long tour group is shown below while visiting the 14-inch Turret Test Block. At this stop, SSG Minton explains the function of the test block and the subsequent actions of the two massive turrets at Fort Drum in Manila Bay, Philippine Islands, during the early days of WWII.



The size of the interior of the test block is very apparent below. The large bolts were used to anchor the 500-ton Army-designed twin 14-inch gun turrets.



The scene below greeted each tour group upon arrival at Battery Gunnison/New Peck. The Battery now looks much as it did during 1943, lit at night with both original and exterior lighting. The platform lights are historic, the rest of the exterior lighting is modern but close in appearance.



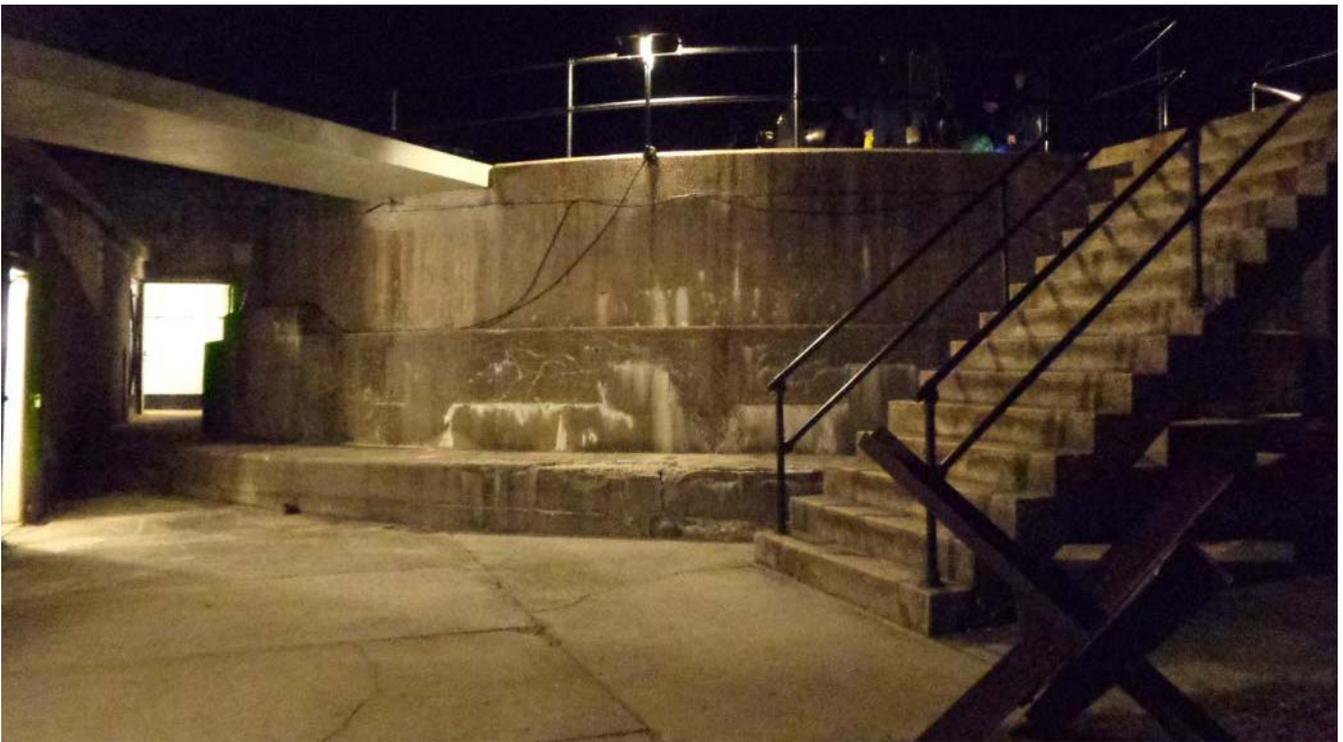
The picture below clearly shows the Gun #1 platform lights, the opening to the magazine and the smaller door into the telephone cabling booth.



Below SSG Weaver stands by for the first group of visitors to the magazine.



In both the photo above and the one below, the new ammunition bridge from the main battery structure to the Gun #1 platform can be easily seen. This bridge was constructed by the National Park Service, and will be fully usable by Coast Defense Days in May 2018.



The role of the Coast Guard was key to the Harbor Entrance Control Post. Below LT(jg) Casalese, USCG Reserve, provides an overview of the role of the Coast Guard in protecting New York Harbor during 1943.



Below LT(jg) Casalese discussed the USCG role with visitors throughout the night.



2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse stand ready with their medical displays in the Chemical Warfare Room. The visitors were not long in coming.



The Chemical Warfare room serves two interpretive purposes - one is medical and the other is the Chemical Decontamination Air Lock. In the photo below can be seen the many medical items which include the 1943 Picker Field X-ray machine, seen on the right. Behind the X-ray machine can be seen the fully functional blower motor for the Chemical Warfare decontamination air lock room.



Components of their medical displays, which fill the whole room, are shown here.



The medical items along the back wall of the room (including a cot) are shown and the open door to the right is the entrance to the decontamination air lock.



The Medical room fills quickly, holding about 12 visitors per rotation.



The Chemical warfare room is always one of the highlights with visitors, and the two 'nurses' explain their materials and how they met the medical needs of the Coast Artillery at Fort Hancock.



The Chemical Decontamination Air Lock was our most significant restoration project for 2017. Below, on the left, are the restored activation chains and switches. To the right, SGT Egan demonstrates the decontamination post by standing on the treadle. This starts the motor for a blast of fresh air that blows a non-persistent chemical agent off the uniform and skin of the soldier and then exhausted out of the chamber.



Below is a photo of the decontamination chamber with the red light turned on signifying that it is in use. This light turns on automatically when a soldier stands on the treadle.



Meanwhile, 1LT Winslow explains the use of the M3 Plotting Board to our visitors in the Plotting Room. This is the only restored Plotting Room in the United States.



1LT Winslow is demonstrating the use of the fire control telephones with two of our visitors. The young man on the right is wearing a HS-17 head and chest set. Pre-computer math in the Plotting Room is always a source of amazement to our younger visitors.



1st Sgt Murray stands in the entrance of the plotting room after having guided a tour group into the room. Tour groups were rotated to a different station every ten or so minutes.



Below 1LT Winslow explains to a new group how the plotting board works, as 1LT Taylor stands by to the right to continue the discussion and answer questions.



The machine shop, one of several “hands on” stations, saw many visitors. Below T-5 Komorowski supervises a young lady on the Atlas lathe as she “faces” a small piece of plastic.



T-5 Komorowski discusses the machine shop operations with our visitors, who are thrilled to see the vintage machines in working condition, some 70 or more years after they were made.



Here, SSG Weaver leads visitors through the shell magazine, explaining the several types of projectiles used at the Battery. These included Armor Piercing (AP), High-Explosive (HE), and “plugged.” These last shells were inert rounds that would be used to fire “Bring To” shots at vessels that failed to comply with commands from the Harbor Entrance Control Post (HECP).



SSG Weaver also discusses powder storage in the magazine. About half of the 300 powder cans stored in the magazine are shown on the right.



Below SSG Weaver shows off one of our newest and most interesting equipment restorations - the large black M2 Mine Case. This large mine represents one of hundreds that were planted in the large Army controlled minefields at the entrance to New York Harbor. AGFA obtained this mine from the State of Delaware in June 2017. We removed the rust, applied rust reformer, primed, and painted the mine in July and August of this year. The mine would be filled with 2,000 pounds of flaked TNT by the soldiers of the Mine Battery of the 7th Coast Artillery Regiment at Fort Hancock. These mines were fired electronically from the Mine Casemate when an enemy ship would sail over the top of the mine. The Mine Casemate is located in what is now the US Coast Guard portion of the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark district. Unfortunately the Coast Guard installation is closed to the public. The mine casemate will always remain outside of the public's ability to visit. We are exploring ways with the National Park Service to actually display some of the most important mine equipment for the public to see and understand what went on at that most critical of defensive facilities.



Below is a photo of Gun #1 showing the carriage fire control lighting along the base ring and on the M1904 telescopic sight.



Throughout the evening small sub groups of each main tour group visited Gun #1. The white powder bag on the cement platform is in a powder bag tray. The powder bag delivery tray was a donation by Roger Davis of the Coast Defense Study Group this past April. It is an exact reproduction of an original owned by Mr. Davis. We made two practice powder bags and this is one of them. The actual powder bags weighed between 34 to 38 pounds, and our reproductions are only slightly heavier. SGT Egan stands on the elevation setter's platform and explains the various parts of the gun to our visitors.



Below PVT Bujdos shows a troop of young Cub Scouts how to open the breach block.



At about 2200 hours (10pm), the last of our visitors prepare to leave - and another very successful lantern tour comes to a close. A wonderful time was had by all.



Saturday had two major events for AGFA members. The first is the Annual Business meeting and the second was our annual dinner. Below CPT (Dr.) Cusano speaks with CPT (Chaplain) Uhler on the porch of Bldg #41, which was the barracks where we stayed.



Our breakfast was served at about 1000 hours given the late hour in which we returned after the tour. We were treated to an outstanding breakfast by SSG Weaver - the master breakfast chef!



During the meeting we updated our By-Laws, reviewed and approved our project lists, recognized outstanding achievement for the year, and prepared for 2018.



Below T-5 Komorowski, Peter Bujdos, 2LT Cusano, 1LT Lutkenhouse and PVT Bujdos participate in the meeting.



Below SSG Minton, SGT Egan, T5 King, CPT Cusano, LTC Welch, SSG Weaver and PVT Bujdos listen as 1LT Lutkenhouse discusses one of our upcoming projects.



NPS Ranger Steve Schiffer presents NPS Centennial Coins to 13 members of AGFA who provided over 200 hours of volunteer effort to the NPS during their centennial year of 2016. 1LT Lutkenhouse holds our speaker for the AGFA members who tele-conferenced in for the meeting.



Below Ranger Schiffer presents T-5 King with his certificate and coin.



After the meeting, T-5 King, T-5 Komorowski and SSG Weaver continued discussing our project lists.



We were incredibly blessed by the Maritime Academy for Science and Technology (MAST) - the premier high school of its kind located at Fort Hancock. They allowed us to use their mess hall, a restored 1941 Army mess hall, for our meeting. Below, T-5 and Mrs. Komorowski, PVT and Mrs. Tunison, 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano arrive.



Below 2LT Cusano and CPT Cusano prepare our catered meal as PVT Bujdos, T-5 Komorowski and 1LT Taylor chat. Our meal was catered by Francesco's Restaurant at (732) 872-0080 and website: www.francescositalianrestaurant.com .



Below our guests Pete McCarthy (NPS Sandy Hook Manager) and Lillian Burry (Chairwoman of the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders) chat next to an original 48 star US Flag and the Coast Artillery Flag.



Our meal was served and we all sat down to excellent food and camaraderie! This is always a welcome moment for AGFA.



We have many strong supporters, but, we count among the most special being Lillian and Don Burry. They are an indispensable team who ensure the history of our Nation in Monmouth County is preserved and protected for future generations. The certificates of Honorary Membership are modifications of 1930s Army forms for reserve commissions. It is amazing what one can do with Office and Adobe software!



As we prepared to depart our dinner, T5 Komorowski chats with PVT Bujdos. The path with the large shell on T5 Komorowski's right sleeve is of the Hawaiian Separate Coast Artillery Brigade, which is where his father served during the Pearl Harbor attack manning the 14-inch guns of Battery Randolph at Fort De Russey.



The photo below shows our guests and our membership who attended the dinner.



Below T-5 King and Pete McCarthy share good times.



After the dinner we adjourned to the barracks (Bldg #41) for good times and camaraderie. Below 1LT Taylor and SSG Weaver share a good laugh.



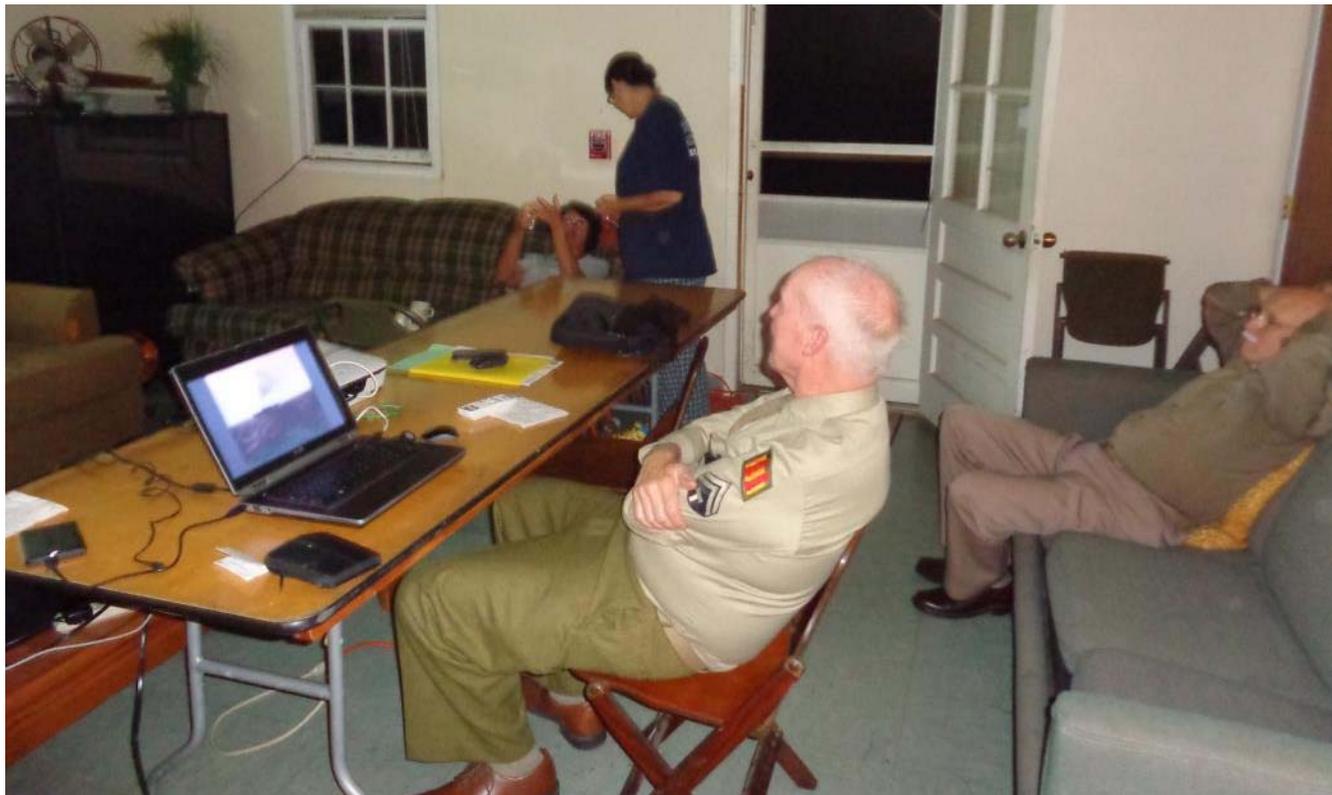
Shortly after arriving, we began to watch 1943 news programs and Coast Artillery Training films focused on 12-inch M1895 guns on long range M1917 carriages - similar to those in Batteries Kingman and Mills. Below T-5 Komorowski controls the computer and projector while CPT Cusano checks his notes.



Later in the evening several members went for a "period walk" around the Main Post area of Fort Hancock. Below PVT Bujdos, SGT Egan and SSG Minton stand outside of Barracks #25. In the dark of night, one can literally sense the presence of the many decades of Coast Artillery Soldiers stationed at Fort Hancock watching over them during the walk.



The viewing of news programs and training films continued late into the evening. Below the members chat and watch the movies.



Sunday morning arrived bright and clear, and we started setup at about 1030 hours. Below 1st SGT Murray prepares his gas mask for the day.



Below PVT Bujdos helps prepare field equipment (cartridge belts, packs, etc) as 1st SGT Murray tests the telephones using a EE-70 head telephone. The EE-70 is a very rare piece of equipment - this one dates from 1927.



On the Gun #1 platform, PVT Bujdos, SGT Egan and CPL Cusano get ready to prepare the gun for the day.



As the public was beginning to arrive, we prepared for a group photograph at Gun #1.



Behind the camera we had many visitors also taking photos of our team standing in front of Gun #1, 6-inch Gun #23, manufactured at Watervliet Arsenal, NY in 1903. Watervliet continues to serve today as a cannon foundry and arsenal.



Below T-5 Rossi and T-3 Moore display their period WWII vehicles as 1LT Di Giovanni walks towards the battery plotting room.



Below is another view of the vehicles with their owners, T-5 Rossi and T-3 Moore, as they chat with our visitors. They are a 1943 Jeep and a 1947 Plymouth Staff Car, identical to the 1941 model.



Period-military vehicles are always a show-stopper, and there was a constant flow of visitors around them throughout the day.



As always, 1LT Taylor was very busy explaining the plotting room to our visitors.



Located in the plotting room is our BD-95 telephone auxiliary switchboard (right photo) and the EE-86A Time Interval Apparatus (left photo). Both are from 1943 and critical to operating our telephone and time interval fire control bell system.



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano prepare for visitors.



Below 2LT Cusano guides visitors into the medical display.



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse demonstrates a vintage needle sterilizer, used under field conditions.



2LT Cusano discusses various medical items with visiting Boy Scouts. The Scout in front is wearing an WW2 Army Medic's yoke, part of the AGFA display.



The vintage medical items, which include US Army Medical Department mess hall crockery, are always of great interest to our visitors.



The historic photo seen here, posed next to a Medic's helmet, is of the Station Hospital at Fort Hancock, built in 1896. Sadly, this building was destroyed by fire in 1985.



Below T-5 King and T-5 Komorowski prepare for visitors in the Machine Shop. The 'new' drill press in the window is a welcome addition to our machine shop - it was used at Fort Hancock in the early 1950s and is very useful for our restoration work.



As visitors enter the Machine Shop, T-5 Komorowski explains the machines.



Below T-5 Komorowski instructs a young visitor how to use a lathe to “face” a piece of plastic stock. Much like the Plotting Room, vintage technology is always a big hit with our younger visitors.



In this photo the young visitor continues the facing process for the end of the piece of plastic stock. This lathe was built about 1940 and was used in the Linden NJ General Motors Plant to manufacture landing gear parts for Navy F4F Wildcat fighter planes.



The photo below provides an overview of the battery display. The weather was perfect, and large numbers of visitors came to see us throughout the day.



Below a large group of Cub Scouts prepares to visit the gun platform.



Below 1st Sgt Murray prepares the Gun Pointer's telephone as SGT Egan discusses aspects of the gun with visitors.



The Gun #1 platform was constantly filled with visitors. Below SSG Weaver rests on the base of the platform, awaiting the group of visitors on the gun platform to finish with gun drills and join him in the magazine.



SGT Egan, Sgt Meiselman, and 1st Sgt Murray introduce the M1900 rifle to the Cub Scout Troop shortly they arrived on the gun platform.



Below, the Cub Scouts are briefed by SSG Egan and PVT Bujdos on how the gun works before participating in a gun drill. 1st Sgt Murray and SGT Meiselman are preparing to join them and initiate the drill.



The gun drill begins. SGT Egan, CPL Cusano, PVT Bujdos, SGT Meiselman and 1st SGT Murray take their places.



After the gun drill the AGFA team poses for a picture with the Scouts.



After the picture, the visitors descended the stairs and headed to join SSG Weaver in the magazines.



Upon entering the magazine, they were greeted by SSG Weaver for the Ammunition tour.



As we finished the day, we packed away our materials. The two new powder bags were inserted into their powder cans. The one on the right was used on the gun platform (notice it is dirty). The one on the left is used inside the magazine and will remain clean. Notice the "red" portion of the bags. This simulates the black powder "igniter" charge on the end of the powder bag. The powder tray for loading rests on the floor just under the right side powder bag.



2017 comes to an end at Battery Gunnison. Final packing of medical equipment truly signified the end of a great weekend. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and 1LT Taylor bring out materials and continue the packing for departure. The traffic cone on the plywood cover reminds us that the new foundations for the Battery Commanders Station Stairs are in, and the stairs will soon be installed!



Throughout the winter of 2017-18, AGFA members and US National Park Rangers will be conducting work periods at Battery Gunnison/ New Peck. On December 16th and 17th we will be hosting our first "Fort Hancock World War 2 Christmas" since 2011 (pre-Hurricane Sandy) at History House. For additional information, please call the Sandy Hook Visitor Center at (732) 872-5970, visit the park website at <https://www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/index.htm> or visit the Army Ground Forces Association Website at <http://armygroundforces.org>. Additional information and scheduling can also be found on the Battery Gunnison Facebook Page, "Battery John Gunnison-New Freemont Peck," at <https://www.facebook.com/Battery-John-Gunnison-168775819848014/>