

Coast Artillery Living History
Fort Hancock, NJ

On 23-25 October 2015, the National Park Service (NPS), in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) and other historic organizations, hosted "Fort Hancock Days" across the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark. This event commemorated 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.

For context, 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 Ron and Yvonne Brodzinski, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Chris Egan, Max Kaiserman, Richard King, Kathleen Kluxen, Henry and Mary Komorowski, Anne Lutkenhouse, Mike and Nancy Murray, Eric Meiselman, Tom Minton, Paul Taylor, Shawn Welch and Bill Winslow. Our guests included Tony Antonnuci, Paul Casalese, Jeff Hanson, Jennifer Keefer, Len Komar, Larry Mihlon, Chris Moore, Steve Rossi, and Anthony Valenti. In addition, we had a very special guest on Sunday, World War II US Army veteran Francis Hayes, who provided detailed information on his service as a combat infantry soldier during the Battle of the Bulge and what Fort Hancock was like for him in the late 1930s to 1943.

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 and guests on Sunday, 25 October behind Battery Gunnison/New Peck.



We started Friday with a tour of the Harbor Defense fortifications located on the active duty Coast Guard Station at the tip of Fort Hancock. In the photo below, AGFA members enter the Mine Casemate. This tour was a very special treat for us, and was facilitated by Chief Warrant Officer McCabe of the US Coast Guard.



The inside of the Mine Casemate was most impressive. Below, members take pictures of the wall that is marked "Mine Casemate 1921-22". This structure was heavily modified for protection against chemical warfare in WWII. The 1940s-era air filtration piping is still evident, running horizontally, with the tall vertical pipe on the left being the air intake.



Below CPL Cusano and SGT Minton are excited to find a telephone communications terminal box from the 1940s in the Mine Casemate Plotting Room. It is always a treat for AGFA members to find surviving equipment/artifacts such as these.



The Mine Casemate is a cavernous structure, with many rooms and spaces. Here, AGFA members are seen exploring the interior.



The passages and rooms within the Mine Casemate are most interesting. The USCG used many of these facilities up to 2012, when Hurricane Sandy struck. Below, AGFA guest 2LT Valenti and SGT Minton prepare to ascend the two-story staircase to the Mine Battery Commander's Station, which offered a view of the minefields. For scale, SGT Minton is seen, right, at the top of the stairs.



The station itself proved to be unique, as it has a "hatch" with a ladder to take one up to the top of the Mine Casemate. Below, 1LT Lutkenhouse watches as SGT Minton climbs the ladder to investigate the top of the casemate.



Once SGT Minton was up, everyone wanted to take a look. In the two photos below, 1LT Lutkenhouse and CPL Cusano emerge from the hatch.



The viewing windows for the fire control instruments of the Mine BC station are shown below. They survive in excellent condition, over ninety years after they were installed.



The views of the “fields of fire” and New York City from these fire control windows are quite spectacular.



We were very impressed with the massive amount of surviving features, which are referred to as “historic fabric.” Here, LTC Welch and CPL Cusano take a detailed look at chemical warfare air filtration equipment.



As amazing as the Mine Casemate was, there was much more to see. With the Mine Casemate in the background, SGT Minton, 2LT Valenti and our guest 2LT Antonucci look into one of the 'cable huts' for fire control communications and mine control cables.



The photo below shows the remaining cables in the bottom of the cable hut.



The photo below shows 1LT Lutkenhouse taking pictures of the 1936 Coast Guard Station. This historic structure is currently abandoned.



We continued our walk through the dunes, heading towards the western side of the peninsula and the bay. We were in search of a very unique historic structure.



Our quarry: A fire control station still stands intact at the north end of Fort Hancock. The two horizontal “slits” in the structure show the two different levels of observation. SGT Minton, kneeling below, prepares to go through the entry hatch.



Being the last such surviving station in all of Fort Hancock, it was a real treat to explore inside. Below, LTC Welch is all smiles as he climbs the ladder to the observation level. 2LT Valenti, at right, was quick to follow.



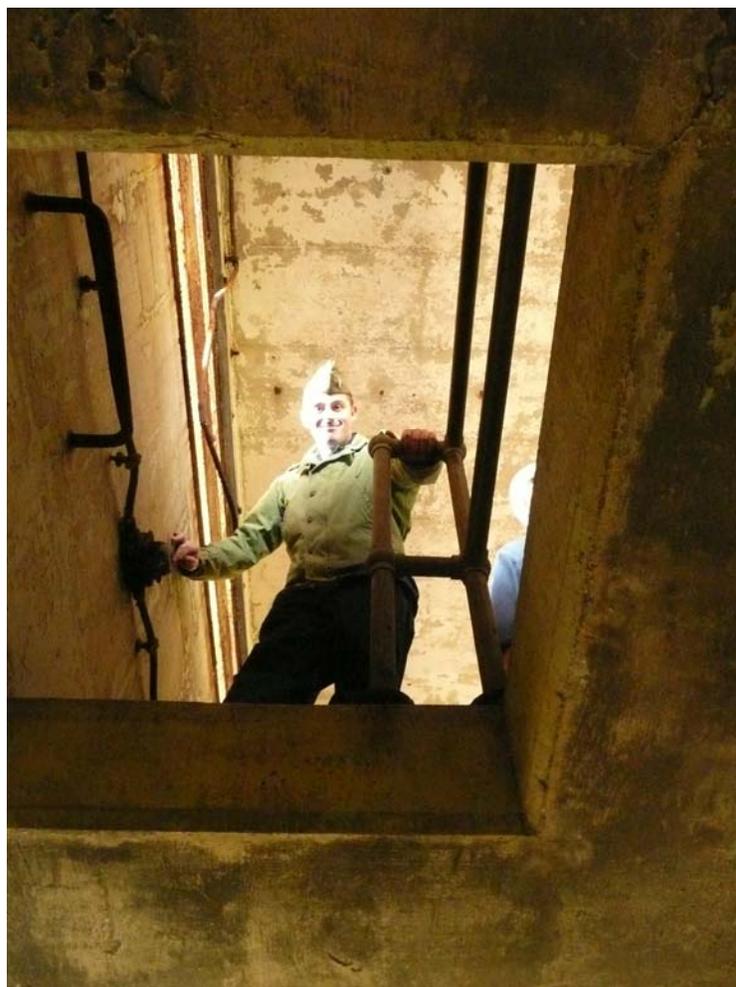
A detailed view of the interior is shown here. Note the different heights of the pedestals (right, and center). The different heights (and corresponding observation slits) allowed two separate azimuth instruments to be used simultaneously.



CPL Cusano is seen leaning on the upper-level pedestal, as 2LT Valenti photo documents the interior. This was the first time many AGFA members had ever been in such a structure.



After we explored the top level of the station, we all prepared to depart the same way we came - down the metal ladder in the wall. In the photo below, 2LT Valenti looks down upon those of us who have already descended the ladder.



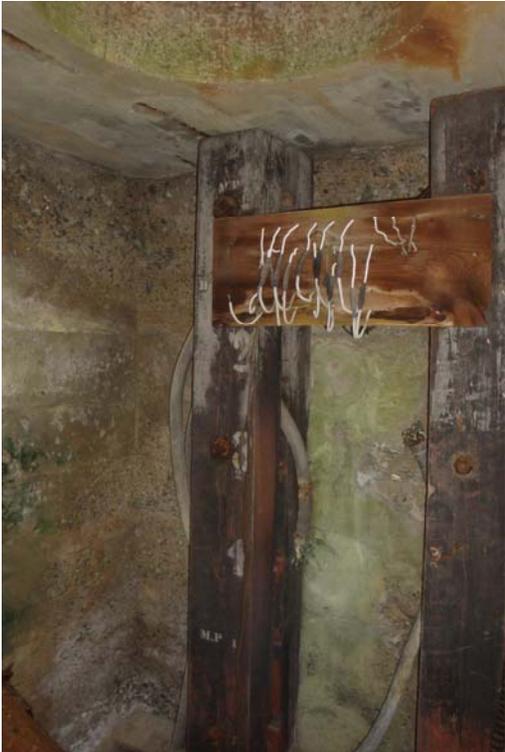
The field of vision out of one of the fire control slits, looking south west, is shown below. The land mass in the background is the Navesink Highlands.



As we returned from the north of the peninsula, CWO McCabe and SGT Minton explored yet another cable hut.



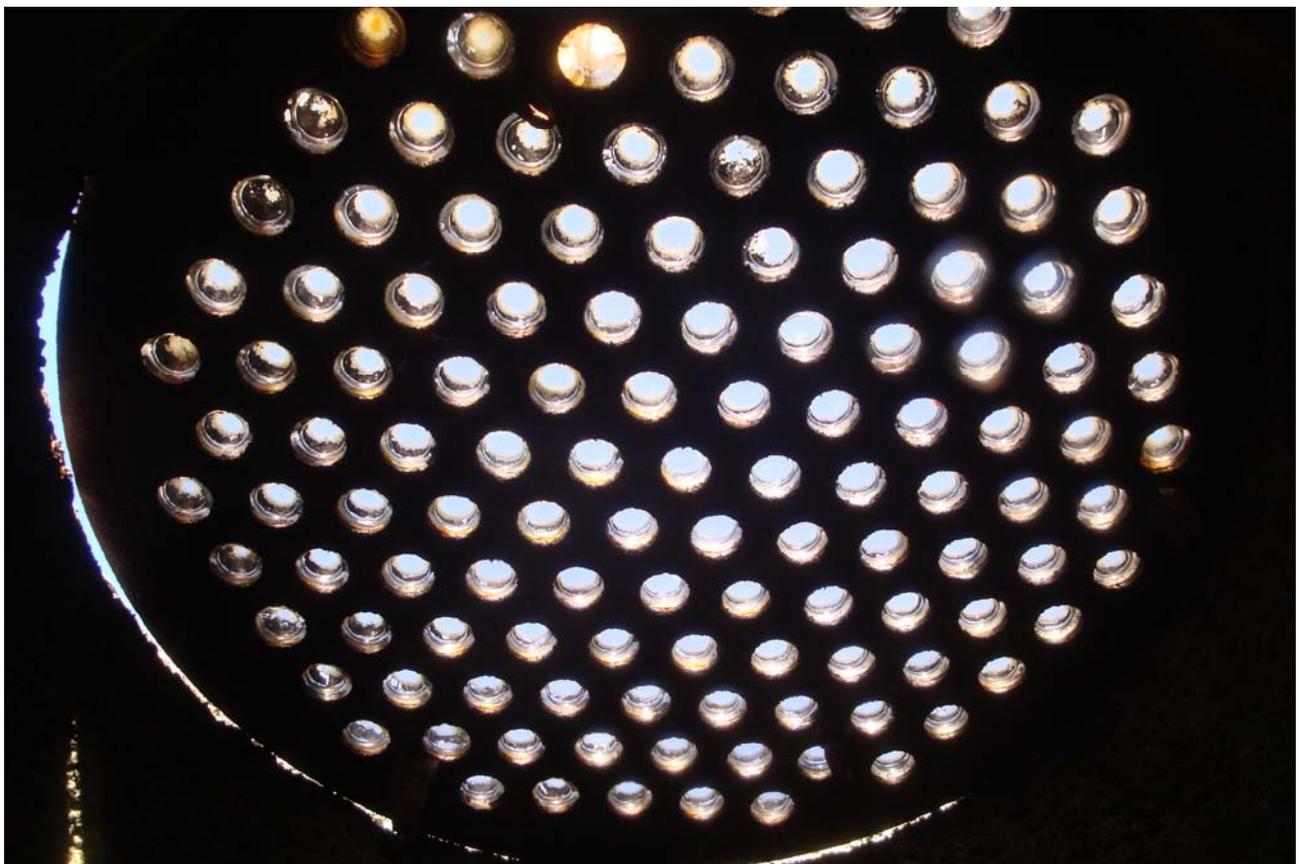
Below, SGT Minton is shown inside the cable hut - his smile indicates another historic "find." On the right is a detailed photo of the remaining cable securing attachments, all between 80 to almost 100 years old.



Typical of the early 1920s fire control cable huts, the top has a "glass light magnifying" panel. This is an extremely effective natural lighting technique, dating back to the age of sail. The exterior of the glass magnifiers are shown below.



The photo below shows the glass light inserts from the inside of the cable hut. This is a unique and effective way to provide lighting inside the cable hut to enable the Signal Corps personnel to work on the telephone wires without requiring additional lighting.



Once we completed the tour of the harbor defense facilities at the USCG station, we got right to work setting up Battery Gunnison for the Friday evening Harbor Defense Lantern Tour. In the photo below, 2LT Antonucci is installing fire control communications wire, which will run to the temporary fire control station on the beach in front of Battery Gunnison/New Peck.



Below, LTC Welch walks up the pathway to the fire control station carrying a DR-8 reel of telephone wire. Notice the shovel, trench, and buried wire in front of him. This is to keep the public from tripping over the wire.



Below 1LT Winslow, SGT Minton and 1st Sgt Murray set up the two M1910A1 Azimuth Instruments at the fire control station. An MC-153 Time Interval Bell sits on the table in the background along with two EE-91 fire control telephones. The wind blowing across the beach area was quite stiff and cold. To our chagrin, it was to get much colder as the night went on.



Here, LTC Welch wires up the EE-91 phones and MC-153 TI Bell. These were patched into the Battery's functional telephone net, allowing a constant flow of communications throughout the Lantern Tour.



Once the battery preparations were complete, the team began to assemble for the tour. Below, the US Army Coleman lanterns (from the 1930s and 40s) are lit as everyone gears up for the tour.



Every year, member Kathleen Kluxen carves a unique and special pumpkin for the event. This year's pumpkin is below. You will easily recognize what it represents.



We took time to pose for a quick photo before splitting into two "sections". One team will stay at Battery Gunnison/New Peck and finish preparations; the other will move to the Post Headquarters area (Bldg 28 and 26) to collect the public tour participants and start the tour. Notice the new period-correct exterior lighting running along the back wall of the Battery. This was installed during the July 2015 work week.



Here, CPL Meiselman, SGT Minton, 1st SGT Murray, 2LT Valenti and BM2 Kaiserman begin the walk to pick up the tour participants. CPL Meiselman is uniformed as a WWI soldier from 1917 assigned to the 57th Coast Artillery Company at Fort Hancock. Since we are approaching the 100th Anniversary of the US entry into the "Great War," we are introducing components of that time period into our interpretation.



The tour team pauses inside the Mortar Battery defensive wall next to the remains of a fire control tower for a photo.



The Lantern Tour is always well attended - tonight was no exception. Here, AGFA members assemble on the front steps of the Guardhouse (Jail) as we awaited the arrival of our guests. The night was cold and clear, with a nearly full moon.



Below, 1st Sgt Murray walks with a smile - we enjoy the tour as much as our visitors. The Lantern Tour is one of the most well attended events of the year at Fort Hancock, and our group swelled to over 100 public attendees!



CPL Meiselman is shown with a 1910-1920 era Adlake kerosene railroad lantern with a Dietz US Army globe. These were often used by the Coast Artillery troops in the World War One and even World War Two time periods for illumination inside the fortifications.



Once inside the Mortar Battery (Harbor Defense Command Post), CPL Meiselman kneels down to talk with younger members of the tour group, and answer questions about his equipment.



The large size of the tour group is apparent in the photo below. Here, SGT Minton talks with some of our visitors. The public kept us very busy with a constant stream of questions about the WWII-era Harbor Defenses.



Meanwhile, our second team was ready to go at the Battery. This shot, taken just before the arrival of the tour, showcases our newest project: four exterior lights (three shown here), which we installed in July. These are very close in appearance to the type of lights that were originally mounted here. They certainly change the appearance of the Battery at night!



A view from the top of Gun #1 platform shows one of the exterior lights, as well as the gun platform light, restored by AGFA in 2008.



The tour arrives! Inside the plotting room, BM2 Kaiserman, 2LT Taylor and T-5 Komorowski explain to the public how math was used to hit the target - without calculators. BM2 Kaiserman is representing a US Navy Sailor assigned to the HECF.



Another photo below shows 2LT Taylor answering questions. Visible below are three of the M3 plotting board's arms, used to pinpoint the locations of targets on the board. Of note, two are brass.



Another major project initiated in the summer, and partially completed, are the new brass plotting board arms. These two station arms were engraved with a "1 inch equals 500 yards" scale, identical to the originals.



The photo below shows the engraved arms with black marker graduations marked on the brass. This will ultimately be replaced by engraved numbers as the project continues. When this project is completed in a few years, all arms will be replaced by brass engraved arms, both azimuth boxes will be replaced with ones made from metal and the top of the board will be replaced and an accurate 1 inch equals 500 yards map will be painted on the board surface.



T-5 Komorowski shows the public how the various machines work inside the machine shop. In this photo, he is working with a lathe from 1941.



The Battery was buzzing with activity, in and out. On the gun platform, SGT Minton begins preparations for a loading drill with our guests. One of the four gun carriage fire control lights can be seen to the left on the range disk.



Another view below of Gun #1 and its fire control lighting shows the light on top of the range disk on the left and on the azimuth circle on the bottom right. Also visible on the breach of the gun is the reproduction firing device - all replicated by AGFA members.



Below 1st Sgt Murray, CPL Egan, CPL Cusano and SGT Minton conduct a gun drill with the public. AGFA members can run gun drills in lowlight conditions as well as daylight to the standard of 15 seconds, a fitting homage to the Coast Artillerymen whose legacy we make great effort to preserve.



Meanwhile, out on the beach, a visitor looks through an M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument at the New York City skyline. Note that the scales on the instrument are illuminated by electric light. The wind was quite stiff by this time of the evening. This gave the public a very real feel for what winter time duty in a fire control station at Fort Hancock was like in 1943 - COLD!



Another visitor looks through the M1910A1 instrument at New York City and ships anchored in the harbor entrance. These scopes are always a public favorite.



Back on the Gun #1 platform, 1st SGT Murray provides preparatory information prior to conducting a gun drill to a new group of visitors.



During his talk, 1st SGT Murray opens the breach. His helmet is “off” as he is relating the functioning of the M1900 rifle of the 1940s to artillery of 2015.



Once the tour was completed and the public had departed for the night, we secured the Battery and loaded our equipment - including "The Battery Pumpkin" - for travel back to the barracks.



We arrived at the barracks by 2330 hours. It was a long, yet productive day. A tired BM2 Kaiserman enters the doorway with his gear as CPL Meiselman and CPL Egan read original Coast Artillery manuals to unwind for the night.



Saturday was formal business for us during the day. Most of the day consisted of the AGFA annual business meeting and training provided by the National Park Service. Below, newly-elected AGFA Board of Directors member 2LT Taylor sits underneath our vintage American 48 Star, and Coast Artillery, flags, taking notes during the meeting.



One of the major events during our business meeting was the election of three new members to the AGFA Board of Directors. Below, T-4 Brodzinski and SGT Minton, two of our newest board members, flank SSG Houck, a long-standing board member.



Below 1st SGT Murray leads the membership through the meeting. Last year's minutes are shown on the screen for all to read, and provide corrections and ultimate approval.



Below CPL Meiselman listens attentively and takes notes during the discussion of our projects list while CPT Cusano smiles for the camera.



Below, the membership looks attentively at the project list shown on the projector screen to the left. It is at this annual meeting where we determine our restoration projects and goals for the following year. Do you have any suggestions for us?



During a break in the meeting, T-5 King, CPL Egan and BM2 Kaiserman discuss issues in the kitchen. To CPL Egan's left is a vintage 1940s 48 cup coffee pot that kept the membership supplied with hot coffee for the weekend.



Beginning late in the afternoon, Pete McCarthy, the senior NPS manager at Fort Hancock, provided National Park Service risk management training for the AGFA members.



Once the training was completed, the majority of the membership present took time for a photo, below, with Pete McCarthy. Pete and the other NPS staff work hand in hand with AGFA to support our restoration work.



Following the meeting, we moved a short distance to the mess hall of the Marine Academy of Science and Technology (MAST). Built in 1940, this is a wonderful example of adaptive reuse. We were very humbled that the high school allowed us to use it for our annual dinner. AGFA members and guests are in the photo below.



Of note, the building began its Army career in 1940 as a mess hall - a role which it still serves for MAST. It wasn't lost on us, however, that this was most likely the first time Coast Artillery personnel had enjoyed a meal here since 1945. It was an honor to hoist the 48-Star American Flag and the Coast Artillery banner inside it for the first time in seven decades, and to enjoy good food with such wonderful company. We would look forward to being allowed to use this mess hall again as we continue our preservation work here at Fort Hancock.



This was also a special time to acknowledge the support of AGFA by key NPS personnel. Below, Pete McCarthy is inducted into the "Ancient and Honorable Order of the Cosmoliner". As the senior NPS leader at Fort Hancock, he is our "go to" manager and assisted us with all manner of things as we execute our mission at Fort Hancock.



Below, Joe Green joins the "Ancient and Honorable Order of the Cosmoliner". As one of the senior interpretive Rangers in Gateway, he has helped provide context and ideas as we work our way through the many unique issues associated with living history interpretation.



Bill Bickerstaff, Facilities Manager for Fort Hancock, is inducted into the "Ancient and Honorable Order of the Cosmoliner". Bill's support of AGFA has been extensive. His ideas and the support of his team have greatly improved conditions at Battery Gunnison/New Peck.



Tim Hudson, Hurricane Sandy Recovery Manager for all NPS across the NY/NJ area, is inducted into the "Ancient and Honorable Order of the Cosmoliner". He has worked hard to restore NPS facilities to include those at Fort Hancock from the damage inflicted by Hurricane Sandy in October 2012.



Jennifer Nersesian, the General Superintendent for the Gateway National Recreation Area, is inducted into the "Ancient and Honorable Order of the Cosmoliner". Her support and guidance have been instrumental in improving the interpretive experience at the portions of the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark managed by the National Park Service.



Lillian Burry, Chairwoman of the Monmouth County (NJ) Board of Chosen Freeholders, is inducted into the "Ancient and Honorable Order of the Cosmoliner". Her support for historic preservation and education is enormous. Her efforts have resulted in the ongoing restoration of Battery Lewis located in Hartshorne Woods County Park. Her leadership was instrumental in bringing an actual 16-inch Mk-VII gun tube to Battery Lewis for preservation and display.



As the evening comes to a close, SGT Minton and CPL Egan prepare to return the 1942 marmite insulated container, loaded with the evening's libations, back to the Barracks using the "traditional" mode of transportation - soldier labor!



And out the door it goes!



Sunday morning dawned very early. We officially opened at noon, but we had visitors arrive much earlier. Below, newly-promoted 1LT Taylor greets visitors at the entrance to the Battery.



We began preparations at Battery Gunnison/New Peck at 1100 hours and worked quickly to open the Battery. Below CPL Egan and SGT Minton set up the elevation board operator's phone mount.



Below 1st Sgt Murray and LTC Welch begin the process of installing the telephone lines from the telephone terminal box in the phone booth to Gun #1 platform telephones.



Below 1st Sgt Murray tests the HS-30 head/chest set and EE-91 telephone for the elevation board operator. As always, it works like a charm. Pretty good for an instrument that is roughly 75 years old!



The team and our guests snapped a quick photograph as the public was arriving in droves around 1215. Visitors can already be seen in the background on the Gun #1 platform to the right. We realized that once we were fully engaged with the public, the picture opportunity would be lost!



Below T-4 Brodzinski mans the entrance control table for the Battery. He was the first "Soldier" the public met as they came into the battery area, and established the historic framework and setting for our visitors.



Another new item for our interpretation is a WWII period bicycle. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse prepares to take a short ride around the Main Post area of Fort Hancock to do some “advertising.”



One of our guests, SSG Moore, brought his Plymouth staff car and parked it on the Battery Parade for the public to enjoy. Period music from the 1940's played from the radio!



As always, many people, to include our own members (T-5 and Mrs. Komorowski below) took pictures next to this outstanding historic car.



We were also visited by our 'past' as well. 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano pose with a "Loyalist" and "young Germanic lady" from the Revolutionary War period. They were portraying members of the Crown Forces who guarded the Sandy Hook Lighthouse from the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.



At the ready, 1LT Taylor prepares to receive the public in the Plotting Room.



Our two new Plotting Board arms are a wonderful addition, and are the product of the hard work of our machine shop personnel.



All through the day, the Gun #1 platform stayed busy. We estimate that over 450 people visited Battery Gunnison/New Peck during the four and a half hours it was open.



The gun crew prepares below for another gun drill. The M1900 seacoast rifles are always a showstopper.



SGT Minton takes off his helmet to relate the 1940s to the modern 2015 time period prior to running a gun drill. We have termed this method of interpretation as "Hats On - Hats Off." Hats on, it's 1943 era, hats off, it is the present time.



Gun #2 can easily be seen from Gun #1 - with the New York City skyline looming in the background.



Always a favorite, at least two Cub Scout packs and two Boy Scout troops spent about 30 minutes each conducting gun drills. In the photo below, two Cub Scouts learn to pick up the shell tray.



Below other Cub Scouts learn how to use the rammer.



And the rammer training pays off as the “shell” is rammed home. In the background, CPL Egan holds a powder bag in preparation for loading.



The large number of Cub Scouts and their parents is shown from this perspective. This is an experience that will last a lifetime for them.



Shown here is the muzzle, or “business end”, of the gun. The markings, 112 years old, are quite clear below. They read, “6-IN Gun No. 23, Ordnance Department USA, Model 1900, Watervliet Arsenal 1903”. If you look closely - the weight recorded is 19,968 pounds. That’s almost ten tons!



The end of a loading drill is pictured below with CPL Cusano seen “extracting” the training shell from inside the tube with a hook. When you don’t actually fire the weapon, you need to unload the shell from the gun tube.



Down in the Chemical Warfare Room, 1LT Lutkenhouse explains an IntraVenous (IV) fluids bottle that is elevated by a metal holder attached to a cot.



The Cub Scouts find the entire display of medical equipment very interesting. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse helps a young Scout put on a medic's equipment yoke and belt.



2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse explain medical items to visitors in the medical station. 1940's medical history is always a hit with our visitors.



Outside the medical station 2LT Cusano speaks with visitors about the medical issues related to serving at a Coast Artillery battery.



2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse stand at the entrance to the Chemical Warfare room on the left. The photo at right shows a young visitor wearing a medic's helmet that 1LT Lutkenhouse provided for him.



Below 2LT Cusano speaks with visitors about the medical equipment on the table at left, which includes a blood pressure indicator (seen at left), a rubber artificial respirator, and a fluid suctioning unit (seen at the table right).



The machine shop was a busy place all weekend. Below T-5 Komorowski explains the milling machine to a visitor.



There are always projects underway at Battery Gunnison/New Peck and many of those projects require the use of the vintage machines. Below, a visitor is actually working on a small item with T-5 Komorowski - this is "hands-on history".



In the plotting room, 1LT Taylor explains the plotting board to a group of young Cub Scouts. Pre-calculator math is always a “unique” experience to our young visitors.



Below a special family joins us in the plotting room, learning how to use the almost 75-year-old HS-17 head/chest sets.



Back up on the gun platform, SGT Minton works with another Cub Scout Pack for a loading drill. These young men are about to “swab” the bore of the gun.



Their “training” complete, the Pack poses for a group photo with SGT Minton and the M1900 seacoast gun they had just worked upon so diligently. These young men proved themselves to be excellent Cannoneers.



Also on Sunday, our special guest, Francis Hayes, spent some time speaking with the Cub Scouts about his experiences at Fort Hancock in the late 1930s until 1943 when he was drafted into the US Army. To these young Scouts, this was an invaluable life experience, and is the core of why we work so diligently - preserving the legacy of the WWII American Soldier for our future generations.



Mr. Hayes was drafted as a combat infantry soldier and deployed to Europe with the 94th Infantry Division. He participated in the Battle of the Bulge and was captured by the Nazi forces on 21 January 1945. He was liberated by British troops on 16 April 1945. He was presented the POW medal by US Congressman Chris Smith earlier this year. Below the young Cub Scouts listen intently as he describes his experiences. We were honored to have him join us for the day. In the background T-4 Brodzinski stands ready to greet visitors at the entrance to Battery Gunnison/New Peck.



The magazine always interests our visitors. Below LTC Welch explains a 2,240 pound armor-piercing 16-inch projectile to several scouts. This is the type of shell that would have been fired from nearby Battery Lewis' 16-inch guns.



In the photo below a group of Cub Scouts asks questions about the ammunition contained in the magazine.



In the photo below a group of Cub Scouts are operating the restored and working 1904 Hodges-type shell hoist - the only one of its kind known to still function.



All young visitors eagerly operate the Hodges shell hoist. This hoist was restored in the 2004-2005 time period by AGFA. The Shell Table was restored and placed in service next to the hoist in 2007.



In the photo below 1LT Winslow explains the 16-inch shell to Bill Bickerstaff and his wife Renee. Bill is the Facility Manager for Fort Hancock and has been instrumental in many improvements across Fort Hancock and at Battery Gunnison/New Peck.



At the end of the day the team worked feverishly to pack up materials and prepare the Battery for winter. At left, 1LT Lutkenhouse packs up medical equipment and materials for storage. At right, 1LT Taylor, 1LT Lutkenhouse, 2LT Cusano, SGT Minton and 1st SGT Murray conduct activities to close the battery at the end of the event.



Below as the packing continues, medical equipment is placed in its storage chests, until needed for the next event.



All secure with breach cover installed, Gun #1 points in a new direction as the new exterior lighting brings a new look to the Battery area. The technical manual calls for storing the gun by pointing in a different direction on a regular basis to prevent “flat spots” from forming on the bearings. In the future, the public will notice the gun pointing in many different directions.



Throughout the winter and spring of 2016, AGFA will conduct work days preparing for May’s Coastal Defense Days event. For information, call the Visitor Center at Sandy Hook, the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark, (732) 872-5970, or visit <http://www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/index.htm>.

For more information, visit the Army Ground Forces Association Website <http://armygroundforces.org>