

Trains and Troops Strasburg, PA

On 7-8 November 2015, the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) supported the Pennsylvania Railroad Museum and the Strasburg Railroad during the annual "Trains and Troops" event. This unique event chronicles the use of railroads throughout American military history from the Civil War to the present day.

The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Doug and Lynda Houck, Anne Lutkenhouse, Tom Minton, Gary and Deanna Weaver, and Shawn Welch. Many of our friends were also in attendance to include Linda Case and her daughter; Kate Krause; Ron and Bonnie Roth, and Jennifer Keefer, to name a few. The educational objective was to provide interpretation of the oft-forgotten and overlooked mission of the U.S. Army's Coast Artillery mobile railway guns and medical support during the World War Two era, as well as the U.S. Army in the Korean War period.

The Pennsylvania RR Museum features a wonderful collection of excellently preserved locomotives and rolling stock within its main building. Interpreters for the Trains and Troops event set up shop in the museum proper, and use the rail cars and engines as a historic back drop. The photo below shows many of our participating membership on Saturday, 7 November in front of our usual event location, a restored Pennsylvania RR box car.



As our setup neared completion, SSG Weaver places some final documents on the table before the public enters the museum.



The photo below shows our medical displays. This included a blood pressure gauge, pneumatic tourniquet and a working EE-8 field telephone from the WWII period tied into our BD-71 switchboard, allowing us to “talk” to the nurses.



Central to our display was a table devoted to the 52nd Coast Artillery (Railway). The regiment served primarily in the Mid-Atlantic region until 1943, notably at Fort Hancock, NJ. A majority of the Coast Artillery railway units were armed with 8" rifles and 12" mortars on special cars, which were part of a larger, self-sufficient artillery train. Designed for tactical mobility, the trains were able to travel to, emplace, and engage enemy shipping from anywhere along our coast lines at pre-planned or improvised firing locations.



In addition to the 52nd CA Regt display, we had a six line BD-71 telephone switchboard, a field desk full of WWII manuals, a EE-5 1918-era period field telephone, as well as ammunition and fire control displays.



In the photo below, CPL Cusano reviews some last minute items in preparation for the public. The circular device to his right on the table is a vintage "wind component indicator" from the WWI time period and used for coast artillery fire control. Two working EE-91 Coast Artillery telephones and an M1910A1 azimuth instrument, used to observe targets and give azimuths for the guns, round out the display.



In the photo below, SSG Weaver, 1LT Lutkenhouse, CPL Cusano and SGT Minton take time for an informal photograph just as we opened to the public.



Nearby, AGFA members Doug and Lynda Houck had a separate display. Lynda is dressed as a WWII war worker - aka "Rosie the Riveter" - and SSG Houck portrays an American Soldier of the 2nd Infantry Division during the Korean War (1950-53).



Here, 2LT Cusano poses for a final photo before the public arrived. She is attired as a US Army Air Corps "Flight Nurse." Note the GI Sweater Vest she is wearing - an extra layer for the 'air evacuation' duty.



Our guests were soon arriving, as this is a very popular event in Strasburg. Here, LTC Welch explains the use and operation of the M1910A1 azimuth telescope to a visitor. In the background are two interpreters portraying members of the American Army in Southeast Asia - known to history simply as "Vietnam."



SGT Minton (helmet off) talks with a member of the public, as well as a young US Army medic from the 36th Infantry Division about Coast Artillery ammunition.



Here, home front civilian war workers Kate Krause and Jenna Baumgartle interpret a display about women working in heavy industry, serving as the backbone of our American industrial strength in World War II. Here, the focus was on the women who helped keep the thousands of trains across the nation running smoothly - nonstop 24 hours a day, seven days a week... for nearly four years.



Two more home-front war workers, Jen Keefer and Amy Mountain, show variations in working attire. Millions of women of that era took up every conceivable job available as America was to war. Both "Rosie the Riveters" and "GI Joes" efforts help give the Allies victory in 1945.



“Rosies” weren’t the only female interpreters at the event. Here, we see a member of the Salvation Army ready to lend all manner of support. Not all the participants of WWII fought in combat, and these civilian displays help show the true depth of US society’s involvement in World War II.



Seen here is a display for a unit of the US Army’s 28th Infantry Division, also known as “The Keystone Division.” They were so named, as they were part of the Pennsylvania National Guard prior to WWII. They saw extensive combat in the European Theater.



A short distance away was another “local” outfit, this one being the 78th Infantry Division, hailing from New Jersey. They were known as “Jersey Lightning” and also saw extensive combat in Europe. Their display is centered on Infantry equipment and weapons.



During a lull in the action, SSG Weaver, wearing the distinctive blue-denim work uniform of the early WWII period, converses with 1LT Lutkenhouse and LTC Welch.



Here, in a very period correct photo, three women ordnance workers and an American Red Cross worker - with a young lad in tow - prepare to hop a ride back into history on the historic restored steam train.



A view from the train, as coal smoke drifts away over the Pennsylvania countryside and the steam whistle echoes off the hills. Is it 1900? 1942? Historic steam trains are one of the best ways to experience days past.



Here, Engine No. 475 slowly chugs by the passenger cars at the end of a run, and prepares to re-couple at the other end of the train for the return trip back to the museum. Built in 1906, dedicated volunteers devote skill, knowledge, and hard work to keep the historic stock 'rolling'.



Another image of days gone by... Visitors get to ride in these beautifully restored passenger cars, all nearly a hundred years old. They are seen here waiting on the tracks while the locomotive recouples at the train's new front.



Back at the station, more living historians are presenting different impressions. Here, this Soldier has a very unique impression - that of the US Army maneuvers in the 1920s at Plattsburg Barracks, NY. His companion is clothed in matching era ladies traveling garb.



In late afternoon we quickly changed into our dress uniforms to attend the swing dance. A highlight of this event is the live swing dance, held right inside the museum. Below are AGFA members with friends preparing to 'cut the rug'.



The band was excellent and there was enough room on the floor to really let loose on the dance floor. It's very unique to get to dance amongst all the locomotives and rail cars.



Great times are always had at the dance - below 1LT Luktenhouse and USO dancer Bonnie Roth chat as LTC Roth smiles his approval at the wonderful tunes coming from the band.



Music was available for all types of dances! Below Jen Keefer and SGT Minton enjoy a slow one, LTC Roth and USO Dancer Bonnie take on the fast ones, and CPT Cusano and Miss Case cut the rug on a more relaxed song.



AGFA members are seen here in a professionally-taken photo at the train station within the museum. Complete with waiting room, baggage room and telegraph room of the stationmaster, this display is an outstanding environment to set the stage for the museum's entrance.



The station's "exterior" is shown here, a beautiful recreation of a standard platform layout that would have been typical of those once found all around the nation.



Inside the station, the ticket booth and cable office has been meticulously recreated as well, down to the last detail. The telegraph keys for the Western Union telegraph service are seen on the desk at center.



Also in the office is the Station Master's desk.



Here is the opposite end of the station platform display. The entire platform is furnished with turn-of-the-century shops and displays. The cars of a passenger train wait patiently for their next visitors, a moment in time frozen from the age of American Rail.



The next morning when we arrived at the museum, a new neighbor had set up his WWI-era US Army soldier display across from ours. The display was a hit with our younger visitors, as shown below.



Soldiers work very hard, and never, ever pass up a moment to relax - even if it means taking a nap on concrete.



CPL Cusano explains the various Coast Artillery railroad guns to a young visitor while SSG Weaver prepares to explain the workings of the BD-71 switchboard to the public.



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse helps a young visitor to “pump up” the pneumatic tourniquet using a jeep and bicycle tire hand pump.



Across the street at the Strasburg Railway, the working steam locomotives were back in action - below, one pulls into the Strasburg station.



The story of the Strasburg Rail Road is very interesting, as you can read below.



Here, woman ordnance worker Jen Keefer explains a railroad car's coupler to a young visitor dressed in an miniature Army olive drab wool uniform.. Military uniforms for children were very popular during WWII, as the entire nation was involved in the war effort and morale building.



Some of the most interesting items in the displays were the WWII "propaganda" pieces. On the left is an ash tray in the visage of Fascist Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, and on the right is a pin cushion on the posterior of Adolf Hitler - allowing users to really "stick it" to Der Furher!



Several vintage historic cars were also on display - to include this beautiful 1942 Ford sedan.



Below, SFC Stauber shows films of Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) work during the Korean War. His display complemented that of SSG Houck's.



SFC Stauber's display contains many unique EOD items to include both 10 cap and 100 cap blasting machines. Safely disposing of dangerous munitions is critical yet dangerous work.



SSG Houck's Korean War exhibit got a lot of attention during the event. The Korean War, often referred to as "America's Forgotten War," receives very little mention in the history books - and that is why SSG Houck preserves the legacy of the veterans of that conflict as well.



There were more than military displays at the event. Having rail road workers set up a display of period railroad material was quite special and informative. They covered the finer points of rail road operations, track laying, and other unique aspects of the era when America moved by train, and not by car.



As the event came to an end, 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse pause to chat just before we disassembled our displays. Other exhibitors are already packed and gone.



As always, we had a wonderful time. We look forward to returning to Strasburg for Troops and Trains in 2016. We hope to see you there! For more information, visit AGFA Website <http://armygroundforces.org> and the Troops and Trains website at: <http://www.rrmuseumpa.org/visitors/seasonal/troopstrains/index.shtml>