

Coast Artillery Living History
Fort Hancock, NJ

On 16 & 18 May 2025, the National Park Service (NPS) conducted the annual spring Coast Defense and Ocean Fun Day event (sponsored by New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium (<http://njseagrant.org/>) in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA). Coast Defense Day showcases Fort Hancock's rich military heritage thru tours and programs at various locations throughout Fort Hancock which occupies the Sandy Hook peninsula. The entire peninsula is designated "The Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark District".

The educational objective was to provide interpretation of the Coast Artillery mission at Fort Hancock in the World War Two-era, focusing on May 1943.

The members of AGFA who participated over the three days were Tony Antonucci, Callum Bujdos, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Joel Gonzalez, Richard King, Anne Lutkenhouse, Gregory Miller, Tom Morrison, Larry Mihlon, Mike Murray, John Uhler, Deanna Weaver, Gary Weaver, and Shawn Welch.

AGFA focused on the activation of two 6-inch M1900 barbette carriage guns at New Battery Peck (formerly Battery Gunnison). The battery structure was reconstructed between March and May 1943. Gun #1 arrived on 8 April and Gun #2 arrived on 21 May. Beginning in April 1943, Battery Gunnison transformed into New Battery Peck.

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 also addressed the operation of the Advance Harbor Entrance Control Post ("HECP") Number 1, which was located at Fort Hancock, and the role that New Battery Peck played as Advance HECP #1's Examination Battery.

The photo below from Sunday 18 May shows that day's participants in front of the machine shop and magazine door areas.



Friday morning was the start of preparations for the event weekend. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano have arrived for setup.



Below SGT Antonucci is connecting a EE-91 telephone in the Battery Commander's Station.



Below SGT Antonucci and SGT Cusano continue setup of the Battery Commander's Station. Notice the MC-153 Time Interval Bell on a wooden stand.



After setup of the BC station, SGT Cusano and SGT Antonucci begin setup of the M1900 6-inch Gun in emplacement #1.



After setup was complete, the team gathered for dinner and to finalize preparations for the Lantern Tour.



Below Mr. Mihlon and SGT T-4 Bujdos discuss plans next to the 1938 Plymouth.



The heavy cloud cover in the late afternoon brought a light rain and conditions dark enough to turn on the exterior lighting.

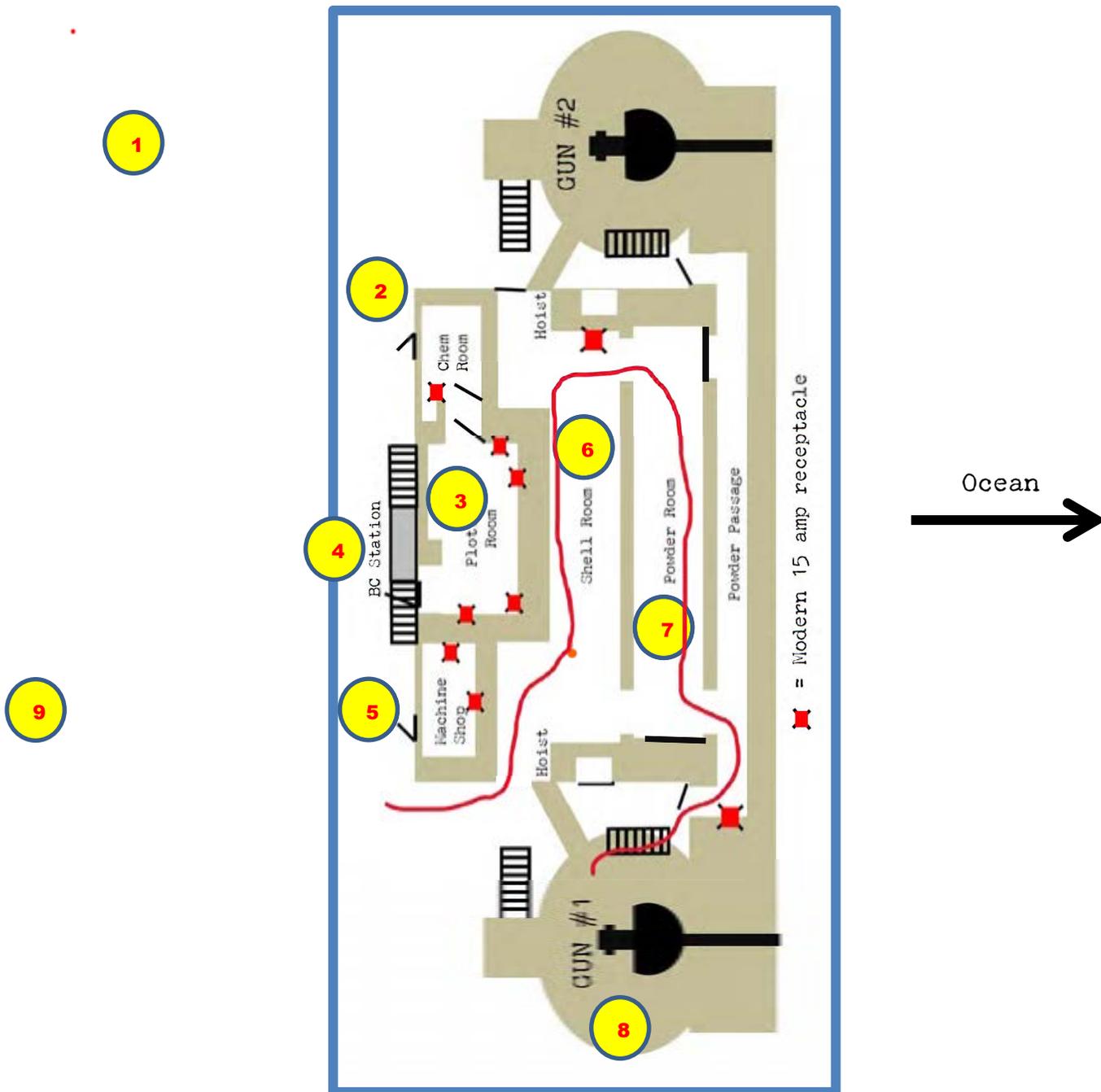


Another view of New Battery Peck and Gun #1, an M1900 6-inch gun, serial number 23 manufactured in 1903.



Below is a listing and graphic for the 9 stations for visitors during the Lantern Tour.

- a. Station #1 (tour groups established)
- b. Station #2 (Medical - Chemical Warfare room)
- c. Station #3 (Plotting Room)
- d. Station #4 (Battery Commander's Station)
- e. Station #5 (Machine Shop)
- g. Station #6 (Ammunition/electric projects/Mine Operations)
- f. Station #7 (Chaplain)
- h. Station #8 (Gun #1)
- i. Station #9 (1938 Plymouth - automobile gas rationing & home front)
- j. Red line shows path from station #5 through #6 to #7 to #8.



Below is the lantern tour team in front of Mr. Mihlon's 1938 Plymouth.



As the tour team walked to the starting point at the Guard House, we passed through the interior walls of the Mortar Battery/Harbor Defense Command Post. Below SGT Antonucci, SGT Cusano and 2LT Gonzalez look into the northwestern mortar pit.



The photo below shows the entrance to the northwest pit. The Park's grounds team did an outstanding job of cleaning out the passage into the pit by removing all the dirt and debris in the passage.



Once we arrived at New Battery Peck, the main tour group was organized into eight separate groups and rotated through nine stations. Below, station #9 is Mr. Mihlon's "Home Front Transportation" station with several charts on gasoline rationing and his 1938 Plymouth.



During Coast Defense Days (May) and Fort Hancock Days (October), we establish an expanded display of various types of Coast Artillery ammunition. As SGT Cusano looks on, from left to right is a board of sectionalized fuses from 1920, a 75mm shell with point detonating fuse (French used by US), two 3-inch armor piercing shells, an M1918 3-inch Anti-Aircraft shell with time fuse projectile, a M1903/M1917 3-inch shell for use against both aircraft and ships (it also has a high explosive shell with time fuse) and a 90mm dual purpose (ship/aircraft) shell. This was part of Station #6.



Station #1 was medical, and below 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano discuss military medicine with visitors.



Station #8 was Gun #1 and SGT T-4 Bujdos discusses the gun with visitors. Notice the lights on the elevation drum (left) and M1904 Telescopic sight (right).



Below in Station #5, TSG King explains the various items in the Machine Shop to visitors.



Station #7 was located in the magazine and outlines the history of the Army's Chaplaincy.



As part of Station #6, CPL/T-5 Morrison and SGT Cusano explain ammunition service to visitors.



Station #9 is below and visitors discuss rationing and operating privately owned vehicles during wartime.



Station #4, the Battery Commander's Station has 2LT Gonzalez explaining the operations of the station to visitors.



The photo below shows the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument and its lighting system shining on an M1 steel helmet.



Another view of the M1910A1 instrument and the station including the EE-91 telephones on the left of the instrument pier.



Below is the Coney Island Jump Tower through the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument. This was an original "bench mark" for orienting the instrument during WWII. The Jump Tower was moved to Coney Island after the 1939-40 World's Fair in NYC.



The photo below shows CPT(CH) Uhler and TSG King doing a quick review of project work as the tour groups move to their next stations.



At Station #8, visitors learn about Gun #1 from SGT/T-4 Bujdos, CPL/T-5 Morrison and SGT Antonucci.



Below SGT Antonucci demonstrates the Breach Block and the replica M1900 firing device that was machined by the AGFA team.



Below is a close up of the elevation drum (left) and M1904 telescopic sight (right) and their lighting systems.



Below the 1938 Plymouth and Mr. Mihlon prepare to depart at the conclusion of the lantern tour.



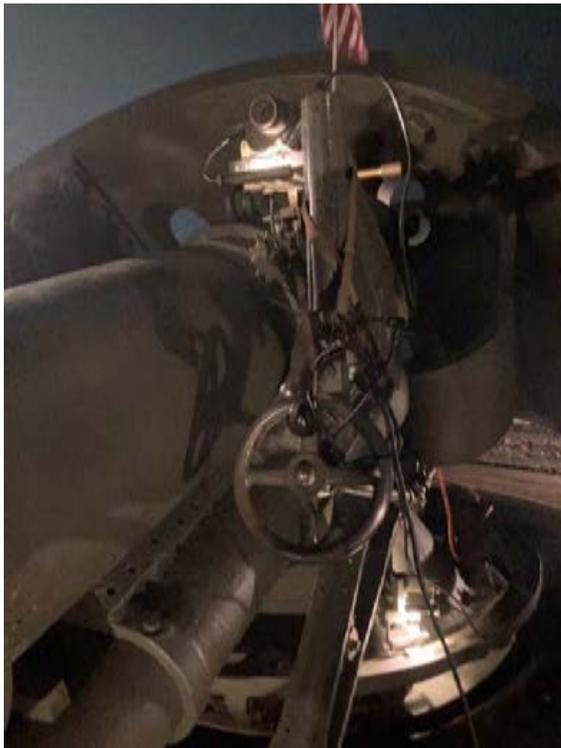
The photo below shows the door and window to the machine shop open as the groups begin movement to their next station.



The photo below shows part of the Chaplaincy exhibit, Station #7, in the powder magazine.



The picture on the left shows the M1904 Telescopic sight (top) and the Azimuth Indicator (bottom) and the photo on the right shows the interior of the Gun #1 telephone booth after the telephone cables are returned to storage at the end of the tour.



The photo below shows the service area of Gun #1 and entrance to the magazine as SGT Cusano continues the work of storing exhibits and locking down Gun #1.



Friday morning dawned early and SGT Antonucci is explaining the plotting room to visitors.



Saturday 17 May had two focuses; (1) continued work on platform lights and (2) education tour of selected fortifications along Atlantic Drive and South Dune Trail. Below TSG King and 2LT Gonzalez work on a platform light for 9-gun Battery.



Below 2LT Gonzales continues the assembly of a restored platform light. These lights are vintage 1915 to 1920 and were removed from 9-gun Battery in 2019-2020 for restoration and reinstallation with a solar powered system.



Below CPT(CH) Uhler uses the drill press in the Machine Shop to prepare a fixture for the platform light restoration.



Below TSG King and 2LT Gonzlez continue their work.



Below SGT Cusano, SGT/T-4 Bujdos, LTC Welch, Mr Mihlon and SGT Antonucci begin the tour of southern defensive fortifications at Fort Hancock down Atlantic Drive.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos and SGT Antonucci are walking past the Generator Building built in 1904. This generator supported a Search Light about 500 feet south of this building.



Our main goal was to locate the two remains of the two Fire Control Towers on Atlantic Drive. Below is one of the piers of a tower.



The photo below from the 1920s shows the two fire control towers on Atlantic Drive.



Below is part of the steel frame of one of the towers.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos examines a block for one of the towers.



Below is another piece of steel framing for a tower.



After visiting the towers, we then explored the Railway Gun area to the east of Atlantic Drive. During our exploration we discovered the Telephone Cable Hut that supported the communications for the Railway Gun Emplacements. Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos exits the interior of the Cable Hut.



About 200 yards from the Cable Hut was another Telephone hut - this one much larger but absent its walls and ceiling. SGT Antonucci is sitting on the top of the left foundation wall.



Below SGT Cusano looks on as SGT/T-4 Bujdos and Mr. Mihlon sit on a 1934 Telephone pole.



Below is the upper end of the telephone pole showing the connections and supports for the telephone cable for the railway gun emplacements.



The photo below from 1922 shows one of the Disappearing Searchlights (inside yellow oval). To the left of that searchlight is the Generator Building referenced above. The generator building to the left is no longer present.



Below is one of the disappearing searchlights elevated for use in the 1930s.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos stands on the first counterweight for the disappearing searchlight near the generator building foundation shown earlier.



Below the team reviews the document we assembled for this hike to help explain the searchlights and their associated structures.



The second counterweight for the southernmost search light is shown below. It is about 500 feet from the earlier counterweight. This one is a much different design and lacks a "pit" to retract into.



Below is another view of the counterweight just off the South Dune Trail.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos and Mr. Mihlon begin the walk back to New Battery Peck.



Below SGT Cusano and SGT Antonucci pause for a picture on the return walk.



Below Mr. Mihlon and SGT Cusano pass the Generator Building near New Battery Peck and the sewage treatment plant (to the right).



Once we returned to New Battery Peck, we began more cleanup and preparation. Below SGT Cusano sweeps sand off the Battery Commander's Station stairs.



At about 1900 hours we had dinner reservations at the Mule Barn Tavern (<https://www.mulebartavern.com/>). As always, an outstanding meal! From left to right is CPL/T-5 Morrison, SGT Antonucci, CPT(CH) Uhler, SGT Cusano and 2LT Cusano.



From left to right is Mrs. Weaver, TSG King, and SGT/T-4 Bujdos.



Sunday morning came bright and early and we had a short Service by CPT(CH) Uhler in Bldg. #41, our barracks building for the event weekend.



Another view of our Sunday Morning service.



Right after our service, the team headed to New Battery Peck for setup. Below SGT Antonucci, SGT Cusano, SGT/T-4 Bujdos and PVT Miller prepare the gun platform.



Below SGT Cusano and SGT/T-4 Bujdos converse on the preparation of the gun #1 platform.



Below 2LT Gonzalez has established the Battery Commander's (BC) Station with all its equipment - the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument, the 1918 optical training device, the two EE-91 fire control telephones and the MC-153 Time Interval Bell.



Another view of the BC station with the M1910A1 in the center and a replica M1 Thompson Sub-Machinegun on the top of the parapet. "Tommy Guns" were common in stations of the Coast Artillery for immediate close in defense.



A view of the BC station ready for visitors as seen from the Gun #1 emplacement.



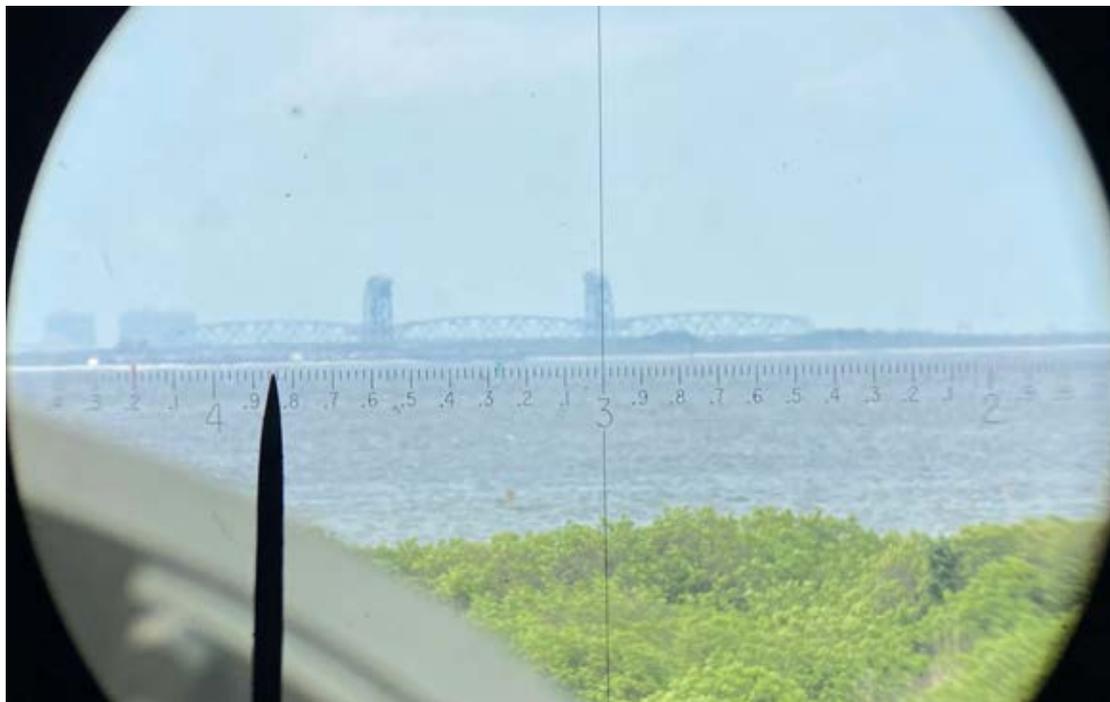
Below 2LT Gonzalez speaks with visitors about how the station functions to support the Battery in operation.



Below is a photo of the Coney Island Jump Tower as seen through the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument. Note the ship to the right of the tower headed into the Harbor.



The view below is of the eastern tower of the Maritime Bridge near Fort Tilden. The two "lumps" of land to the left of the tower are the casemates for the two M1910 16-inch guns of Battery Harris.



Below the BC station is full of visitors. On the right a visitor is looking through the 1918 optical training device. Another visitor is looking through the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument.



The medical station had significant visitation. Below 2LT Cusano discusses medical aspects of Fort Hancock's defenses.



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse is in the medical station near the entrance to the M1 Collective Protector's "Decontamination Air Lock" for entrance into the plotting room. The large instrument to her left is the 1943 Picker Field X-Ray machine designed for use in the forward medical stations near the combat areas. It was used to find fragmentation within a human body to reduce the need for "probing".



Below 2LT Cusano chats with a visitor regarding medical operations at Fort Hancock.



Another view of the medical displays within the mechanical room of Battery Peck.



From left to right is a (1) Chemical Weapons identification chart; (2) a chalk board outline of the evacuation process in the field and (3) an actual X-Ray film.



Below TSG Weaver discusses the operations of the Plotting Room with visitors.



Below is the M1905 Deflection Board in the plotting room. It's associated EE-91 telephone with TS-9 handset and HS-17 head/chest set is directly above the board.



Below 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse are with Lisa McDermott, the NPS Roads and Grounds supervisor - her team keeps New Battery Peck and the rest of Fort Hancock's vegetation well maintained. We thank her and her team for their support!



Below, TSG King chats with Diana Burich, Director of Education for the New Jersey SeaGrant Consortium. SeaGrant is the host for the Ocean Fun Days weekend.



As visitation permits, TSG King continues work on the Platform lights. He is working on one of the shades from the platform light project.



Below TSG King is testing a part on the shade in the machine shop.



Below shows part of the Chaplaincy Exhibit in the powder magazine.



Exhibit space to the left covers the history of military Chaplains. The photo to the right shows a vintage 1943 Field Organ.



Below PVT Miller plays the vintage WWII field organ for visitors.



And he also conducted repairs and tuning on the organ as time permitted.



Below PVT Miller plays the organ for visitors during the afternoon.



PVT Miller and CPT(CH) Uhler pose for a photo just outside the plotting room. PVT Miller is interpreting a Coast Artillery Soldier that has a secondary assignment as a Chaplain's Assistant.



The photo below shows the Gun Commander's telephone inside a vintage 1915 era Gun Telephone Box. What is unique about this particular photo is the door on the box. AGFA was lucky to obtain an actual vintage door for this box in 2024. The EE-91 telephone is inside the box.



Below the team prepares for a gun drill. 2LT Gonzalez has his hand on the breach block as the rest of the team awaits the drill's start.



The drill begins - SGT Cusano is moving forward to swab the breach as 2LT Gonzalez opens the block. Right of them 1st SGT Murray prepares to remove the spent primer from the firing device.



SGT Cusano moves out of the way as the shell detail (PVT Miller and CPT(CH) Uhler) move in with the projectile and LTC Welch stands by with the rammer (left).



Below left to right, SGT/T-4 Bujdos moves the powder tray away as LTC Welch finishes ramming the powder bag into the breach. SGT Antonucci has set the elevation. 1st SGT Murray moves in to insert the primer as 2LT Gonzalez prepares to close the breach and TSG Weaver has confirmed the settings on the M1904 Telescopic Sight.



Below 2LT Gonzalez has just closed the breach and 1st SGT Murray is inserting the primer into the M1900 Firing Device.



This drill took a total of 14 seconds. The maximum time allowed is 15 seconds. It is easy to determine the 15 seconds because the MC-153 Time Interval Bell rings every 15 seconds.

After the loading drill is completed, the whole operation is reversed to remove the projectile and powder bag. Below SGT Cusano uses the extraction rod to pull out the projectile.



The photo below shows SGT Cusano pulling the shell out of the breach and CPT(CH) Uhler and PVT Miller supporting the shell with the shell tray.



The photo below shows Gun #1 with the public. It is capable of 360 degrees of traverse and below it is pointed back towards highlands.



Below in the center are two key NPS personnel - Law Enforcement Ranger Banfield and Ranger Jen Cox. These two individuals are key to our ability to provide interpretive programming and restoration work at Fort Hancock and we thank them for their support and encouragement!



The day ends promptly at 1630 hours and we begin the process of storing the implements, telephones and materials and locking the gun. Below SGT Antonucci and SGT/T-4 Bujdos begin breaking down the gun platform.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos takes implements back into the magazine and 1st SGT Murray disassembles the Gun Commander's telephone.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos locks the elevation system. The breach cover is already installed and the M1904 Sight Cradle is the only item left to secure.



After all the work is done, we head back Bldg. #41 near the light house for our dinner delivery from Pomodoro (<https://www.pomodororossopizza.com/>).



With Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck fully secured, another “Coast Defense Days” weekend comes to an end. The Battery will be open during the summer during workdays that are scheduled with the National Park Service. AGFA’s schedule can be reviewed at <http://armygroundforces.org/new-events.htm>. Learn about the Mule Barn Tavern at Fort Hancock by visiting <https://www.mulebartavern.com/>. For additional information regarding the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark District visit the NPS website <https://www.nps.gov/gate/index.htm> or call (732) 872-5970.