

## Fort Hancock Days Weekend Ft. Hancock, NJ

On 24-26 October 2025, the National Park Service (NPS), in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) hosted the annual "Fort Hancock Days", commemorating the formal renaming of the "Fortifications at Sandy Hook" as "Fort Hancock" by the US War Department (now known as "Department of the Army") 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.

This event was very different because the Federal Government was "shut down" due to a lack of Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations. AGFA was able to continue operations as it is a philanthropic partner of the National Park Service and a fully indemnified non-profit corporation. But there were limitations to our programming since the NPS was not working except for critical services such as law enforcement. As a result of this situation, the "Harbor Defense Lantern Tour" became the "Night Open House at Battery Peck". There were other restrictions that ultimately reduced the number of AGFA members that were able to support the weekend. However, we were able to operate and did so to the best of our abilities.

This year marks the 82<sup>nd</sup> year since Battery Gunnison was restructured with the two M1903 6-inch disappearing guns removed and the two M1900 6-inch barbette rifles installed and the battery being renamed Battery Peck.

The members of AGFA who participated during the weekend were Callum Bujdos, Donna Cusano, Joel Gonzalez, Richard King, Bryce Kleeman, Noah LeBlanc, Anne Lutkenhouse, Larry Mihlon, Tom Morrison, Mike Murray, Pat Ragosta, Jerry Still, Wally Tunison, John Uhler, Gary Weaver, Shawn Welch and our guests Anthony Ricci and Ken Scarano.

There were three major components to the weekend; (1) the "Battery Peck Open House" Friday evening; (2) AGFA's annual business meeting and dinner on Saturday and (3) Fort Hancock Days event on Sunday.

The educational focus was interpreting the Coast Artillery mission at Fort Hancock in the World War II-era, specifically 1943 emphasizing the ongoing U-Boat war, the threat of saboteur activity and potential 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 Battery Peck played as Advance HECP #1's Examination Battery.

The photo below shows most of the participating members on Friday, 24 October in front of Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck. At the top of the stairs is the Battery Commander's station with its M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument in place on the concrete pedestal, ready to track ships.



Friday began with opening Gun #2 (north gun) and setting up the entire gun platform. Below PFC LeBlanc is working on the firing device for attachment to the gun.



Below 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse move a field table to the medical display room.



By mid-afternoon the Battery Commander's Station was set up with its M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument, two EE-91 telephones and MC-153 Time Interval Bell.



A quick look through the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument at the Maritime Bridge over in Brooklyn. The blurry item at the left is Gun #2.



Below left is 1LT Lutkenhouse setting up the medical display. Right is NPS Law Enforcement Chief Ranger orienting the M1910A1 on the Maritime Bridge.



Coffee is king and Mr. Mihlon is getting himself a cup!



SGT/T-4 Bujdos takes the Battery Bicycle to check at the Post Guardhouse for any visitors expecting the lantern tour. He found several visitors and they came to Battery Peck.



Below a visitor experiences the M1900 6-inch gun by training it on a ship in the channel.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos and PFC LeBlanc are awaiting more public visitors.



In the photo below a large ship is silhouetted against the NYC skyline.



Inside the magazine a pair of visitors chat with TSG King about the 9-gun platform light project. The box against the wall is the electrical controls for the project.



Below Mr. Mihlon's 1938 Plymouth "unmarked police cruiser" is calmly awaiting visitors.



The entrance area for Gun #2 has been significantly “de-cluttered” and two posters are on the wall.



Below CPT(CH) Uhler speaks with a visitor from Easton, Pennsylvania.



Below two visitors discuss medical issues with 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse.



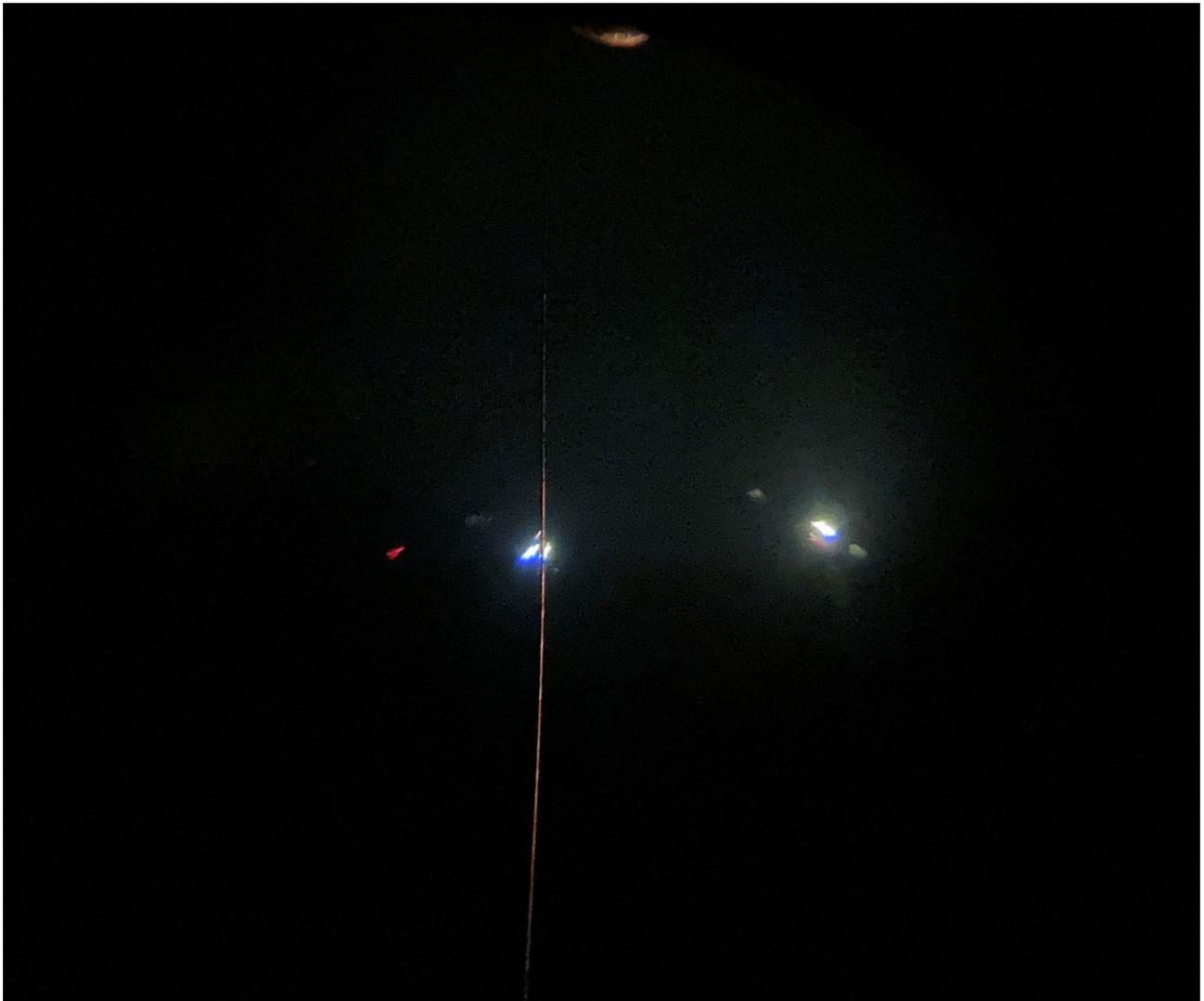
Below is part of the medical exhibit.



Below is a side photo of the M1900 6-inch rifle (Gun #2). The yellow arrow points to the M1904 3-inch telescopic sight.



The photo below is looking through the M1904 sight at two ships at sea. The reticle is lit by a lighting wiring harness that contains four different bulbs. One is for the deflection scale on the sight cradle, one for the azimuth indicator and one for the elevation drum.



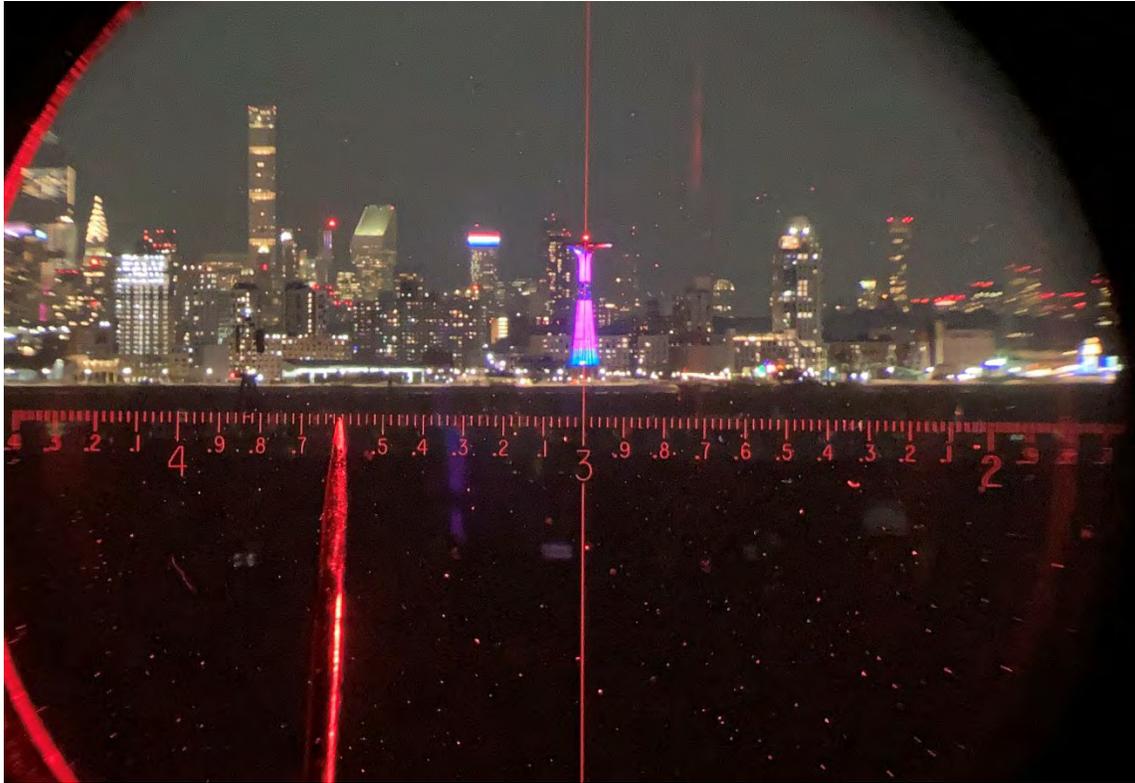
Below are several public visitors and two NPS Law Enforcement Rangers. The support of the LE Rangers is important as a major protection from vandalism and graffiti.



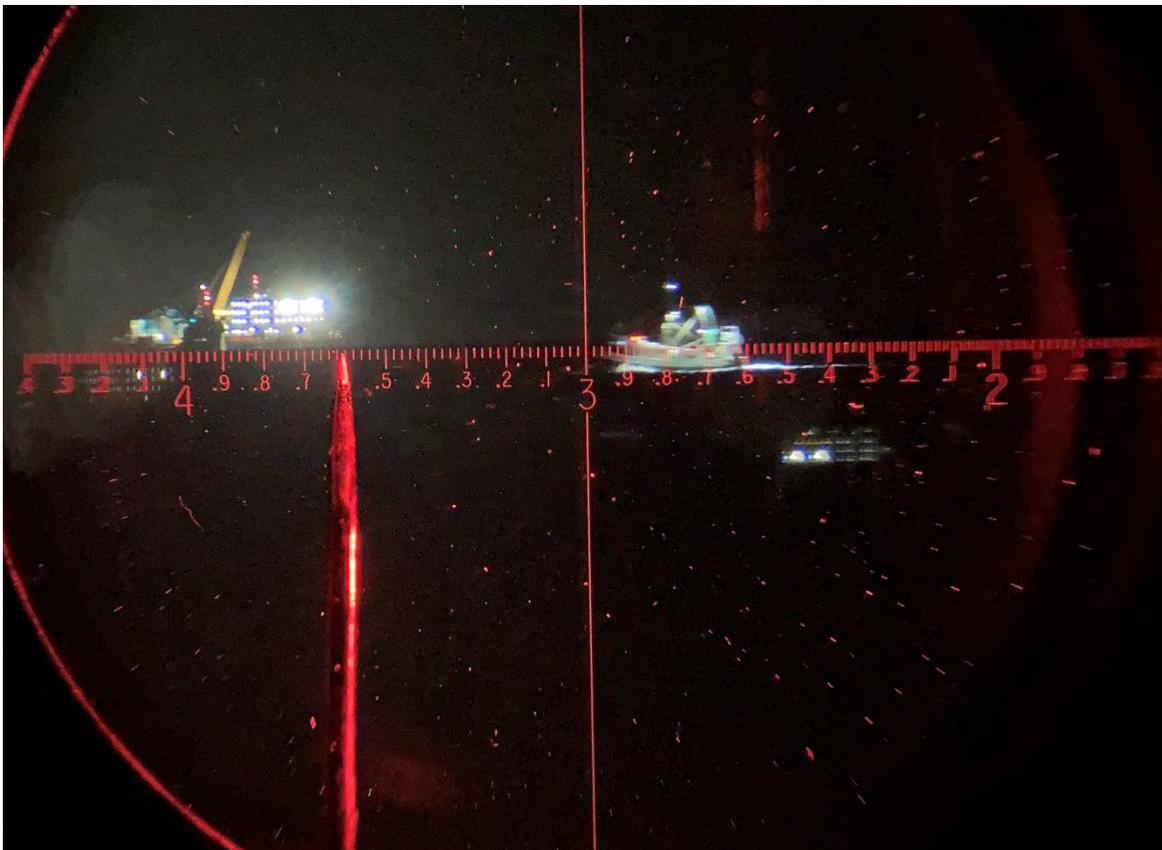
Below 1LT Lutkenhouse talks with visitors in the plotting room.



Looking through the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument shows the Coney Island Jump Tower.



And another view below of two ships moving in the harbor entrance area. What is important is when ships are lighted or the moon is bright, ships can be tracked at night.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos begins the process of disassembling and storing the Gun #2 components.



PFC LeBlanc is disconnecting the Gun Pointer's EE-91 telephone.



After the Battery was secured, SGT/T-4 Bujdos and PFC LeBlanc took a walk in the Fort Hancock post area in winter 1941/42 attire. They even met a few visitors for impromptu interpretive activity!



Saturday late morning we held our annual business meeting - below we prepare to recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag (a 48 star Flag of course).



The meeting met its quorum with eight voting members present and our voting members on a conference line.



At 1300 hours we took a picture with the team and a visitor - The NPS Grounds Supervisor!



Below five of our team march off to do “professional development education” at various sites across Fort Hancock.



While the walking team was gone, several members remained at Battery Peck and educated at least 50 visitors - below a group of 15 visitors are with 2LT Cusano on Gun #1 platform.



The team walked to the 14-inch twin gun turret test block and were met by NPS LE Ranger. We reviewed several documents and learned that after its use for the M1909 turrets for Fort Drum in Manila Bay, the block was used to test M1917 long range carriages for M1895 12-inch guns.



As we continued our walk, SGT/T-4 Bujdos shows the team original documents on fortifications items along the Multi-Use Path.



At the gun line of the Sandy Hook Proving Ground, SGT/T-4 Bujdos, PFC Kleeman, NPS LE Ranger and NPS Grounds Supervisor discuss what potential uses this gun mount would have served.



Below PFC Kleeman leads the team on the Multi-Use Path.



The team visited the 12-inch shells (left) in front of the entrance to Battery Potter. As we prepared to move on, PFC LeBlanc enjoyed a few moments of foot rest!



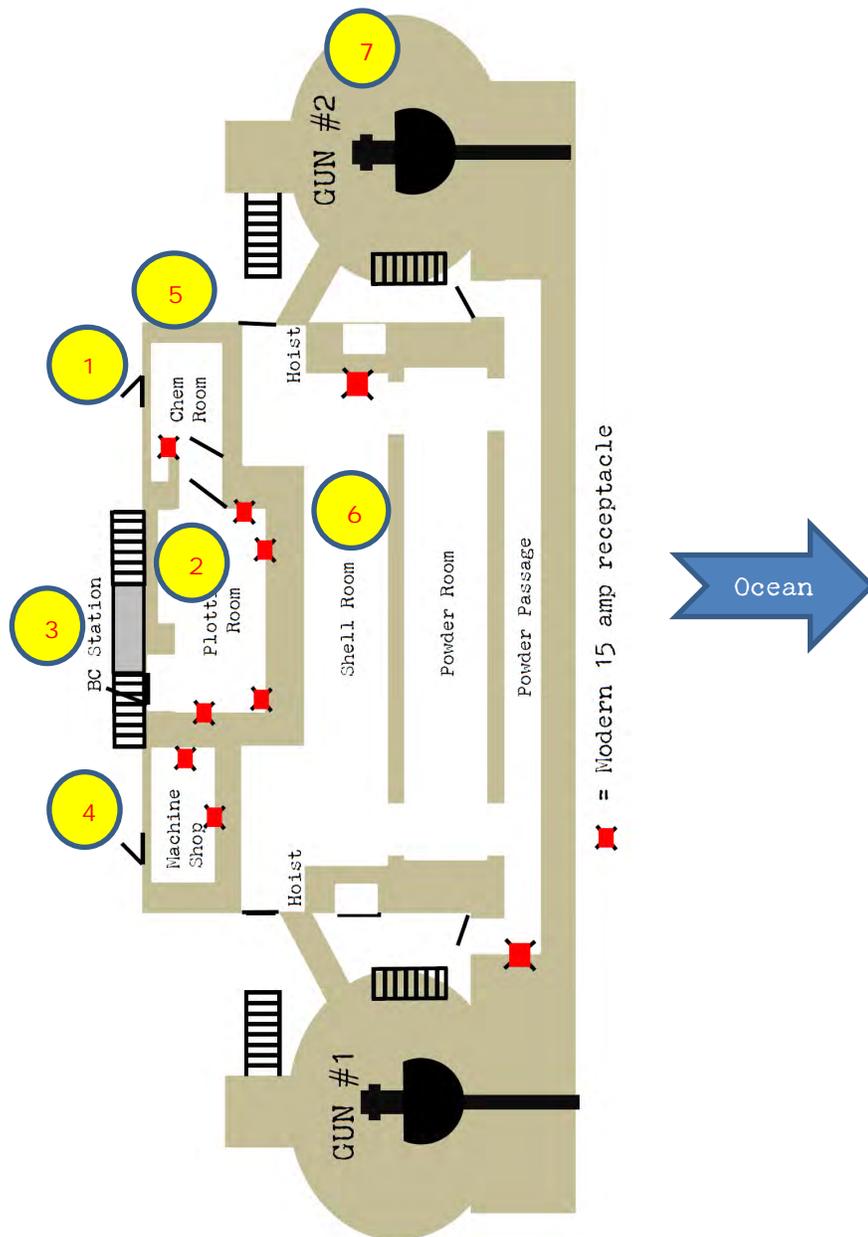
Below the team returns to Battery Peck - SGT/T-4 Bujdos carrying a bit of "trash" for proper disposal.



On Fort Hancock Days (Sunday 26 Oct) the Battery was structured with the “interpretive stations” as outlined below. These stations operated throughout the day.

- A) Station #1 (Medical Operations & M1 Collective Protector)
- B) Station #2 (Plotting Room)
- C) Station #3 (Battery Commander’s Station)
- D) Station #4 (Machine Shop)
- E) Station #5 (Chemical Warfare)
- F) Station #6 (Magazine - Ammunition & Mine Operations; restoration projects)
- G) Station #7 (Gun #2)

Each station was manned until a Gun Loading Drill was conducted on Gun #2. For gun drills members would close their stations and proceed to the gun platform.



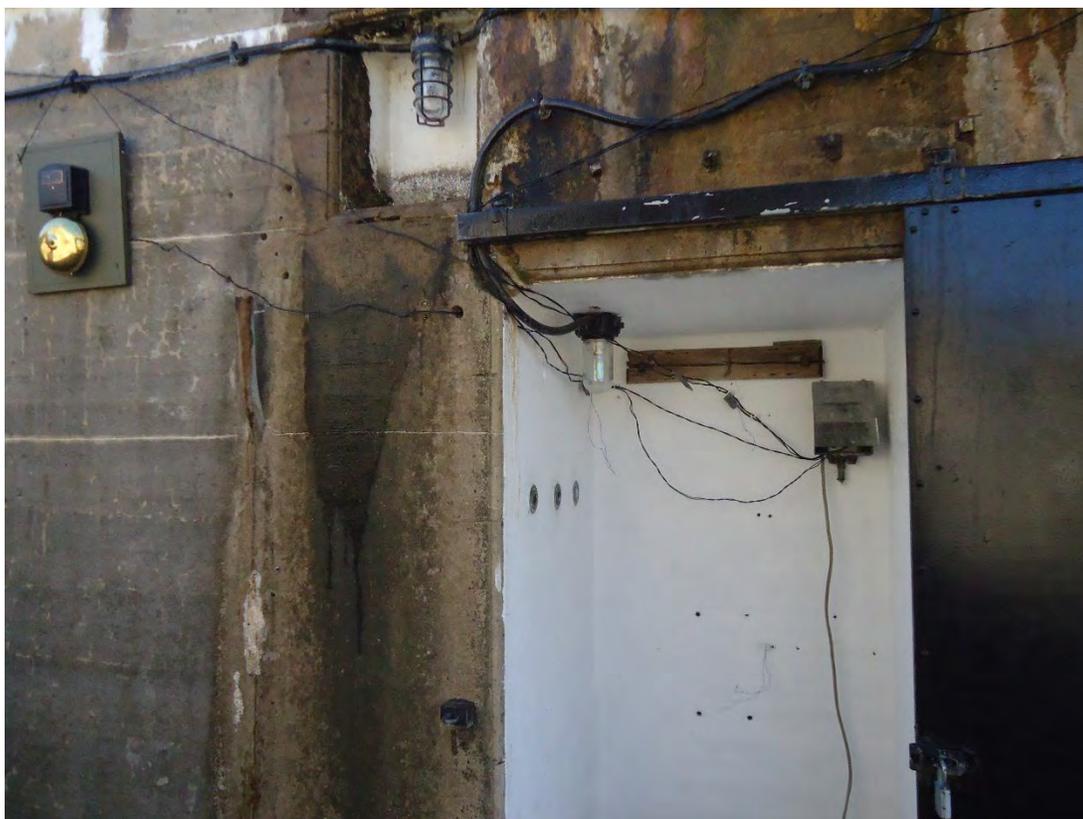
On Sunday 26 October, a tour group from the National Museum of Industrial History in Bethlehem, PA ([www.NMIH.org](http://www.NMIH.org)) visited Fort Hancock. At about 1100 hours, they stopped for a photo at the 20-inch Rodman cannon in front of the Mule Barn Tavern.



While NMIH was touring Fort Hancock, we began our setup. Below PFC Kleeman and PFC LeBlanc are setting up Gun #2.



Below the team is connecting all three gun platform EE-91 telephones to the Battery telephone system. The cables below are being strung out to their various points.



Below our guests arrive with their Jeep and its M2 .50 caliber machinegun.



Next to the magazine entrance to Gun #2 we established the Chemical Warfare equipment display.



The display had several gas masks, agent identification kits, decontamination equipment and other items unique to Chemical Warfare and required at a Harbor Defense installation during WWII.



Below is more complete view of the Chemical Warfare display.



Below 2LT Cusano organizes the interior of Battery Peck's plotting room.



Below SGT/T-4 Ragosta connects the Battery Commander's Station's MC-153 Time Interval bell to the Time Interval system. The base of the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument is already emplaced to the pier.



By noon the BC station was established.



Below, from left to right, is the reproduction Time Interval Apparatus; the 1943 EE-86 Time Interval Apparatus with the cover off showing the rotating timing disks, then two EE-91 telephones connected to the BD-95 auxiliary switchboard.



At noon our team assembled for a photograph before we "opened" for the day. We already had a few visitors on Gun #2 platform.



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse greets visitors to the Plotting Room.



1LT Lutkenhouse continues a discussion with visitors from the NMIH Tour!



Below Tony Ricci's jeep with M2 .50 caliber machinegun greets visitors.



Below is another view of the jeep with 1<sup>st</sup> SGT Murray and TSG King chatting.



Below several visitors are in discussions in the Battery Commander's Station.



Below 2LT Gonzalez observes several ships in the channel through the BC Station's M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument.



Below is a view of the Maritime Bridge in Brooklyn through the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument.



Below is a view of one fairly large ship and several smaller boats through the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument.



Below TSG King discusses his platform light project for 9-gun battery with NMIH visitors.



Below is our ammunition display in the magazine.



Below are several members reviewing the Chemical Warfare display. To the right we see the 1938 Plymouth and the Jeep on the Battery Parade.



An "uncluttered" view of Gun #2.



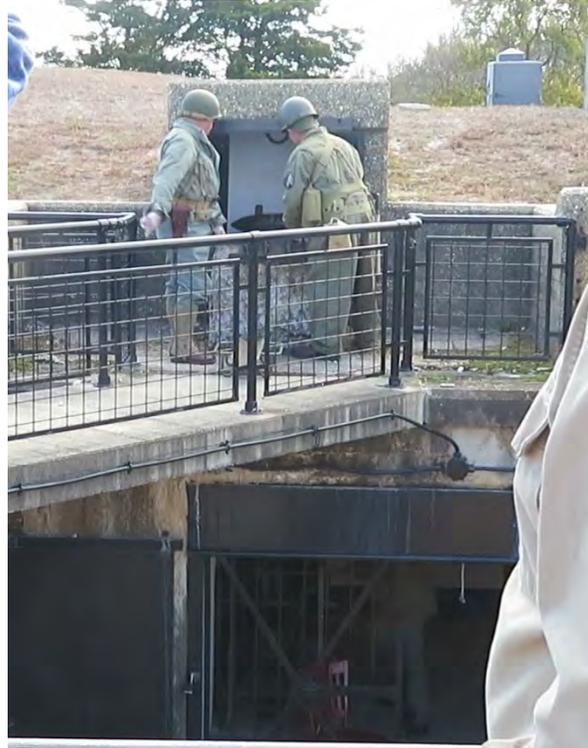
Below 1<sup>st</sup> SGT Murray explains gun operation as SGT/T-4 Bujdos adjusts the elevation mechanism and 1LT Lutkenhouse sights the gun on a target.



Below LTC Welch outlines the steps of gun operations with the NMIH visitors as the team prepares for the loading drill.



Below left, the shell team (2LT Gonzalez and SGT/T-4 Ragosta) are standing by for TSG King (below in the door opening) to crank the hoist to raise a shell from the magazine. Below right, SGT/T-4 Ragosta secures the shell that has come up the hoist (black object between the two men) and prepares to put it on the shell tray



Below the shell team brings the shell out to the gun on the shell tray.



The Gun Crew is ready for the signal to start loading.



The drill has begun - PFC Kleeman is swabbing the chamber area to eliminate "burning embers" from the previous "shot".



SGT/T-4 Ragosta and 2LT Gonzalez hold the shell tray as LTC Welch rams the shell into the chamber.



SGT/T-4 Bujdos hoods the powder tray as LTC Welch rams the powder bag into the chamber. On the left, SGT/T-4 Ragosta and 2LT Gonzalez take the shell tray back to the hoist.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos removes the shell tray from the breach area as LTC Welch completes the ramming of the powder bag into the chamber.



Below are some of our visitors - about half are from the NMIH tour group.



In the photo below, our guest SGT Ricci (elevation setter) just completed elevating the gun and looks over at 2LT Gonzalez who just closed the breach of the gun. 1LT Lutkenhouse is aiming the gun using the M1904 Telescopic sight. 1<sup>st</sup> SGT Murray is preparing to insert a primer.



After the gun drills, our guests moved to get a hands-on look at the M1900 6-inch gun, serial number 22, manufactured at Watervliet Arsenal in 1903.



Below the AGFA team is shown with the NMIH Tour Group. Members 2LT Still (khaki) and TSG Weaver (blue denim) were the tour guides for NMIH. They joined the tour in Bethlehem, PA at the NMIH complex early that morning and were with them all day.



The NMIH tour left Battery Peck at about 1430 hours and headed to Battery Lewis in Hartshorne Woods Park overlooking Fort Hancock. The large entrance in the background center is to Battery Lewis's Gun #2 emplacement. Battery Lewis was constructed from 1941 to 1942 and the guns and fixtures were installed through 1943. The Battery was test fired in December 1943 and fully entered service in February 1944. Below AGFA members 2LT Still, TSG Weaver and SGT/T-4 Tunison are preparing the team for the tour of Battery Lewis.



The interior of Battery Lewis is massive. Below the tour team enters from Gun #2 emplacement and walks into the main corridor. The frames hanging from the ceiling are part of the overhead ammunition handling system.



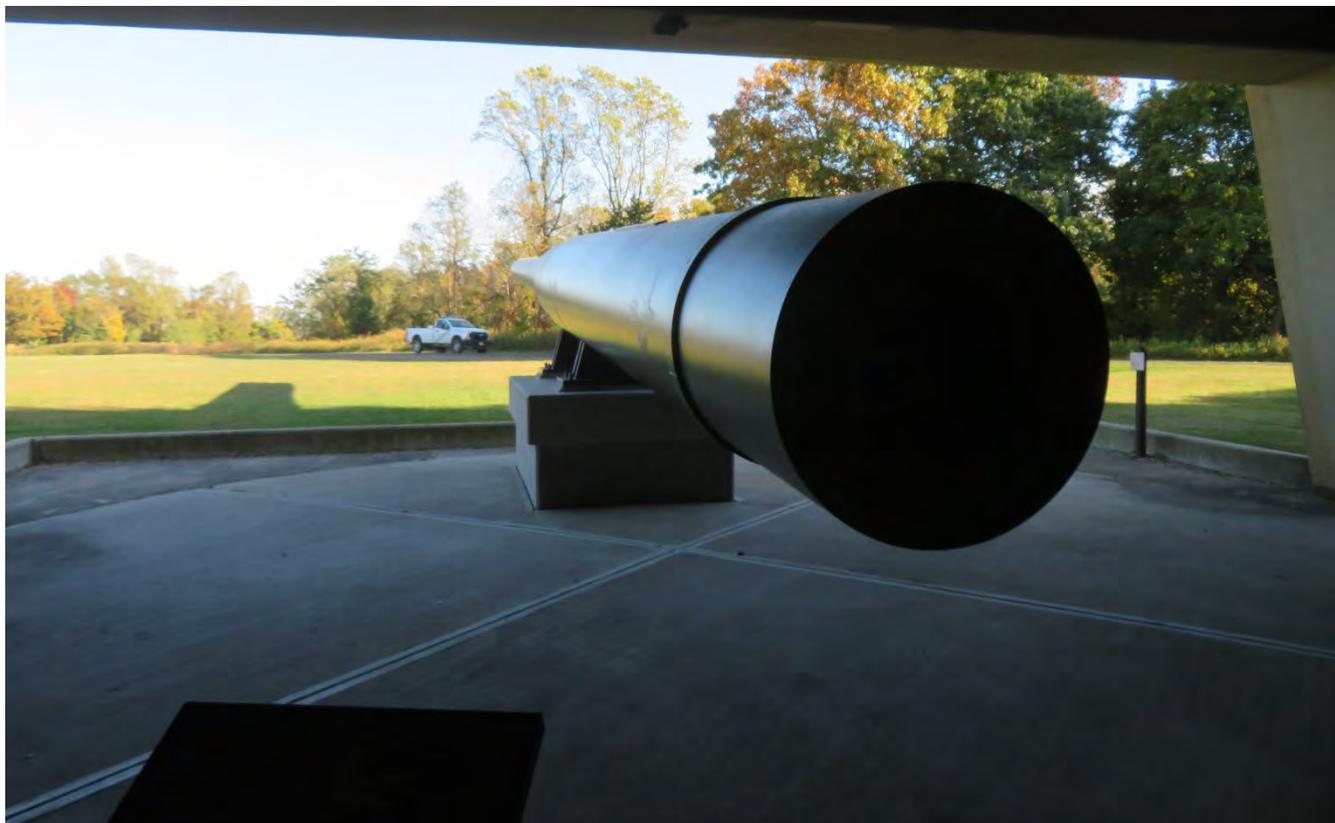
Below the tour team visits a shell magazine with fifteen replica Mk-12 2,240-pound armor piercing shells. Notice the overhead ammunition handling system and its lift.



The Gun #2 emplacement has a Mk-VII Navy 16-inch gun tube. This gun tube was once mounted on the Battleship USS New Jersey (BB-62) and weighs 240,000 pounds. The gun is smaller than the Mk-II guns that were originally mounted - they were heavier at 270,000 pounds.



Another view of the gun from the breach end.



While the NMIH team was at Battery Lewis, the rest of the AGFA team continued public interpretation. Below the team is discussing the Service Gas Mask with visitors.



Below, PFC LeBlanc is removing his gas mask from its carrier as SGT/T-4 Bujdos looks on. Behind, PFC Kleeman discusses the operations of the M1900 6-inch gun with visitors.



Below, PFC Kleeman is testing the M3 diaphragm Gas Mask with the HS-30 head and chest set to see how well he can communicate using the mask. Diaphragm Gas Masks are designed to aid in vocal communications by amplifying the voice through the mask face piece.



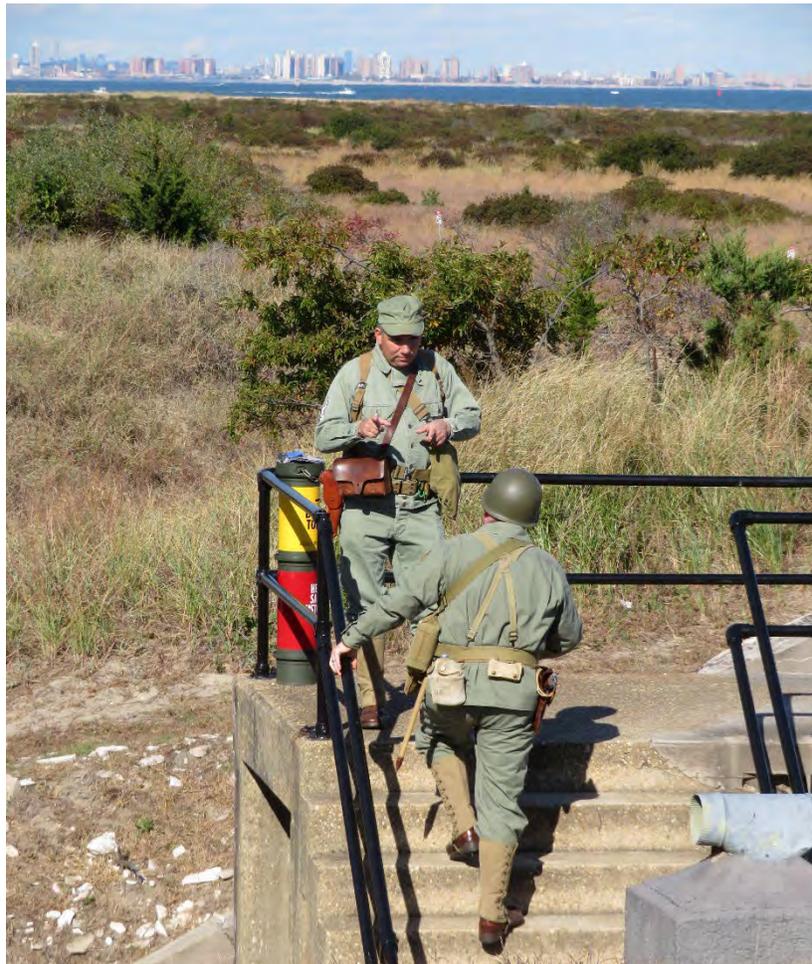
Below PFC LeBlanc tests the “training mask” for effectiveness against the service mask in observing a target through the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument. These kinds of “tests” validated the appropriateness of specific gas masks for specific uses and were common in the 1920s through to today.



Below is the full view of PFC LeBlanc as he tests the telephone system while wearing his service gas mask.



Below 1<sup>st</sup> SGT Murray and LTC Welch confer on the upper stair landing for Gun #2.



The end of the day is upon us and Mr. Mihlon is preparing to start and warm up his 1938 Plymouth for his 20-minute drive home.



At roughly the same time, SGT Ricci and SGT Scarano are in the jeep and ready for the ride home.



Below PFC LeBlanc and PFC Kleeman bring the Signal Corps equipment foot locker (telephones and Time Interval Bell) back inside the magazine.



The day is ending as 1<sup>st</sup> SGT Murray and 1LT Lutkenhouse briefly chat and 2LT Cusano is packing medical display materials in the background.



Another "Fort Hancock Days" weekend has come to an end and the team is preparing the Battery for the winter and its role as a "work shop" until the May "Coast Defense Days" event. Visit <http://armygroundforces.org/new-events.htm> for our calendar of upcoming events.