

1943 Coast Artillery Christmas Celebration Ft. Hancock, New Jersey

On 13-14 December 2025, the National Park Service (NPS) and the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) presented a 1943 Christmas Celebration at "History House" and Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck located the Fort Hancock Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark District (the entire Sandy Hook Peninsula).

The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Tony Antonucci, Callum Bujdos, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Henry and Mary Komorowski, Anne Lutkenhouse, Tom Morrison, Wally Tunison, John Uhler, Shawn Welch and our guest Sarah Kolar.

The educational objective was to provide an interpretation of the Harbor Defense soldiers of Fort Hancock as they would have celebrated Christmas in 1943.

The photo below shows the participating membership and guests on Saturday in the parlor room of History House. The home was built in 1897, and completed just in time for the outbreak of the Spanish American War in 1898. Designated originally per Army standards as a "Lieutenant's House", the home is 4,500 square feet and was intended for one junior officer and family. History House is known formally as "Quarters 1" and is one of 18 homes which comprise "Officers Row," one of the most visually appealing features of Fort Hancock's Historic Post.



The event was scheduled for two days at History House, however, a significant snow storm arrived in the metro New York City area and shut down roads and movement throughout the area. Fort Hancock (Sandy Hook) was closed on Sunday morning and did not open until 1500 hours that day. The weather had other "plans" for the weekend!

Several members arrived on Friday 12 December to do limited work on the NPS portable light system inside the Mortar Battery which was the Harbor Defense Command Post (HDCP) during World War II. Below is a string of lights after replacing bulbs.



Below are an NPS Ranger, SGT Antonucci and SGT/T-4 Bujdos inside one of the larger rooms inside the HDCP.



On Saturday, several AGFA Members set up in History House. Below CPT(CH) Uhler sets up his US Army 1943 vintage field organ (musical instrument).



Below Sarah Kolar and CPT(CH) Uhler are preparing for the day. To the left is 1LT Lutkenhouse and Ranger Sara working on a donation can mounting.



Below Mrs. Komorowski is with visitors in the restored kitchen of History House.



A large number of Christmas Cookies were on the table and our visitors are headed to those cookies!



After a very busy few hours, by mid-afternoon on Saturday, visitation slowed a bit. Below Miss Kolar and Ranger Tom had a chance to chat in the living room.



Below is one the NPS Volunteers ready to chat with visitors.



Below is a photo of the dining room. In the corner is a fine china cabinet.



The photo below shows the collection of vintage items in the china cabinet.



Below is the "office" inside the Officer's home. This is where the officer would have worked during the day when he needed "office time".



The wall below has various posters from the time period of the 1940s.



While History House was busy, so too was Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck. Below LTC Welch, SGT/T-3 Tunison, CPL/T-5 Morrison, Staff Sergeant/T-3 Komorowski and SGT/T-4 Bujdos.



Below, SGT/T-4 Bujdos is preparing Gun #2 for the public. The gun would be made functional for traverse, elevation, and sights.



Inside the plotting room we had many visitors through the day. The questions were good and each visitor was able to experience parts of the Battery.



Below is another photo of visitors in the plotting room.



Below SGT/T-4 Tunison chats with visitors about the operations of the M1900 6-inch gun.



Below is another view of the gun with SGT/T-4 Tunison and CPL/T-5 Morrison.



Below SSG/T-3 Komorowski discusses the operations of the Machine Shop to visitors. The 1941 Atlas Lathe is open to his right.



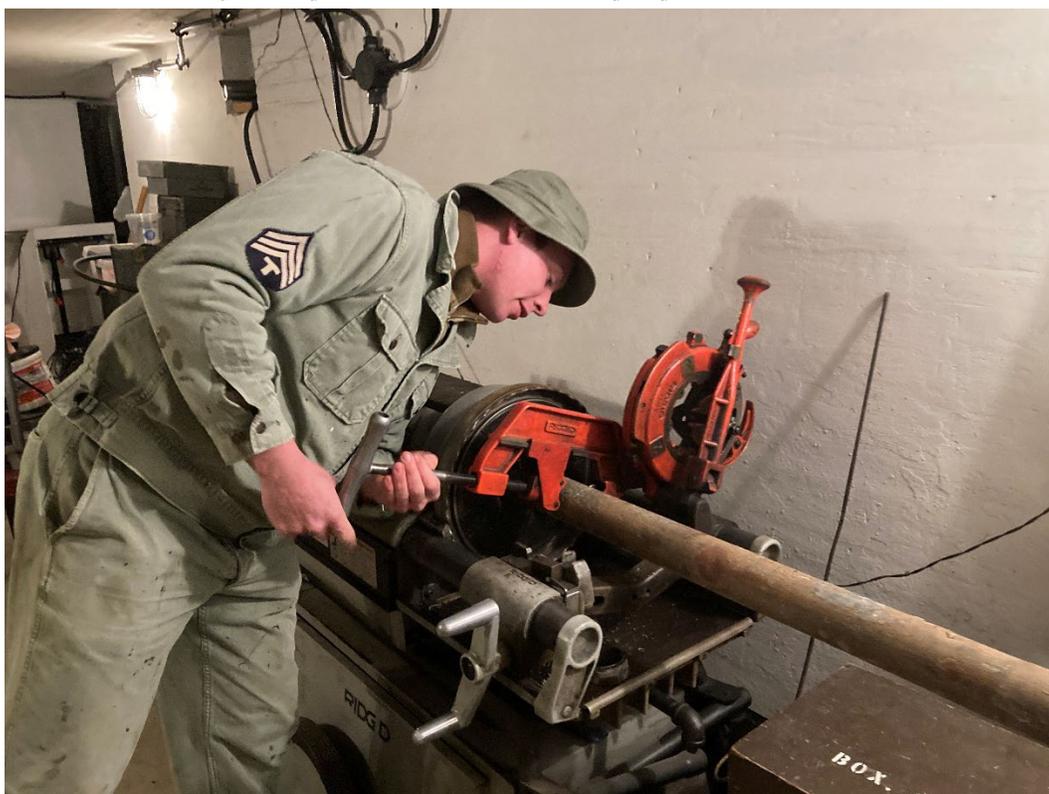
Below T-5 Morrison is discussing munitions with a visitor in the shell magazine.



Below CPL/T-5 Morrison opens a "Fuse Board" from 1920 to show visitors the various types of "Bore Safe" fuses that were "proved" at the Sandy Hook Proving Ground pre-World War I development.



Late in the afternoon SGT/T-4 Bujdos used the pipe cutter to make a new post. In this case he is cutting the post and then will prepare it for use.



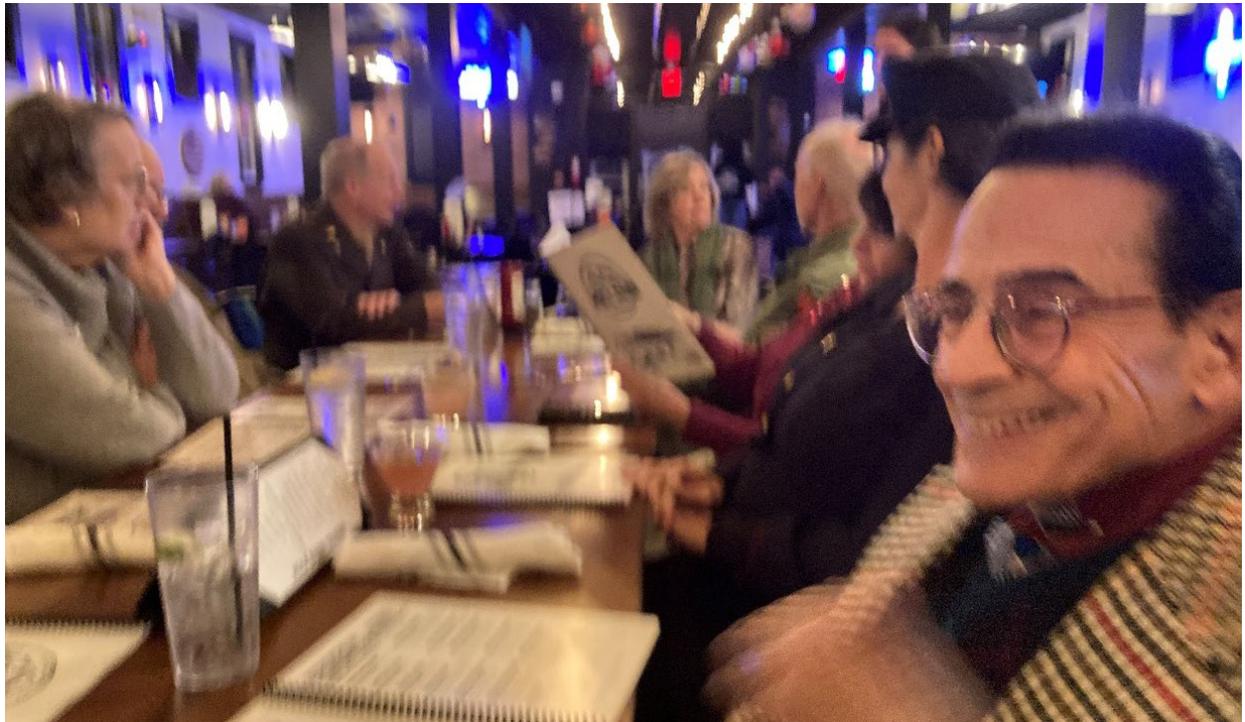
As the day ended, SGT/T-4 Bujdos walked from Gun #2 to Gun #1 to drain the oil from the elevation gear box.



Below SGT/T-4 Bujdos drains the oil out of the elevation gear box on Gun #1. This is a winterizing measure to prevent water from freezing inside the gear box.



Saturday evening we all had dinner at the Mule Barn Tavern.



As you can see in the photo below, the inside of the Tavern is festively decorated. Learn more at <https://mulebartavern.com/>.



By 2000 hours on Saturday evening, the snow began to fall. This photo is early Sunday morning and shows we can barely see past the Mule Barn. The snow was heavy and thick.



By 1400 the skies had cleared and we went to History House to pick up our display materials. The park remained closed to the public until 1500 hours - there were very few visitors. When we got to History House, we borrowed some shovels to remove snow from the entrance. Below SGT Cusano is now awaiting the keys to access the building.



Many NPS personnel were out shoveling snow from important buildings. Below we just finished loading CPT(CH) Uhler's van with the Field Organ and displays.



Later in the day the sky cleared. NPS personnel came by and shoveled snow on the walkways at Bldg #102 (barracks). We borrowed shovels to help and cleared our cars.



Hopefully the 2026 Christmas will avoid being "snowed out"!

During the winter Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck's exterior will be open for self-guided tours. Visit <https://armygroundforces.org/new-events.htm> for our current schedule. For information visit the NPS website at <https://www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/index.htm> or visit <http://armygroundforces.org>