

Coast Artillery Living History Ft. Hancock, NJ

On 12-14 October 2018, the National Park Service (NPS), in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) and other historic organizations, hosted the annual "Fort Hancock Days". This event commemorates 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 (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.

The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Andy Bennett, Ron and Yvonne Brodzinski, Callum Bujdos, Paul Casalese, Doug Ciemniecki, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Chris Egan, Doug and Lynda Houck, Richard King, Henry and Mary Komorowski, Anne Lutkenhouse, Eric Meiselman, Tom Minton, Jerry Still, Paul Taylor, Wally Tunison, John Uhler, Gary Weaver, Shawn Welch, and Bill Winslow. Our guests included Joel and Renee Gonzalez.

The educational focus was interpreting the Coast Artillery mission at Fort Hancock in the World War Two-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 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 on Sunday, 14 October. This is the second public event weekend where the new Battery Commander's Station stairs were in place and available for use.



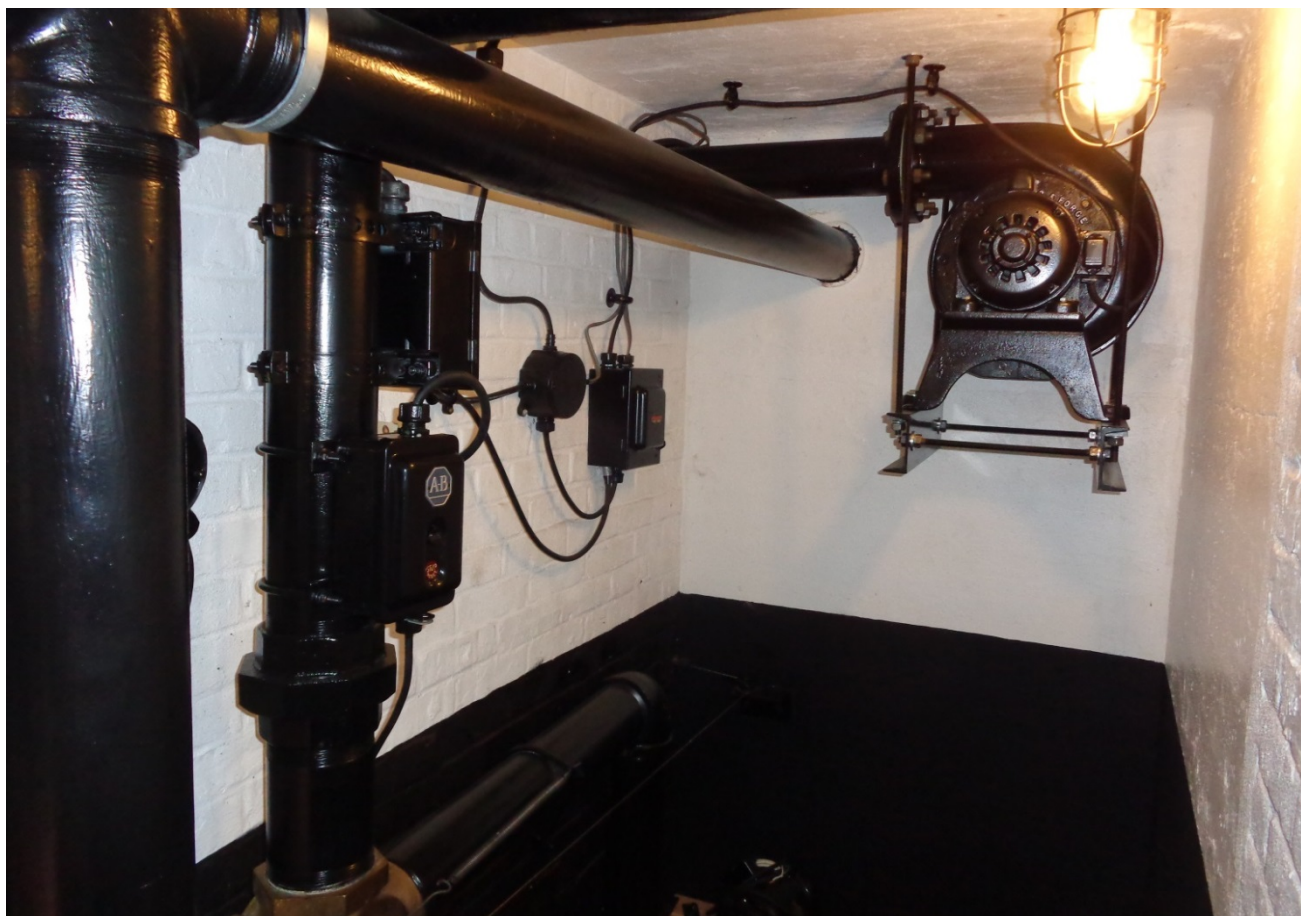
Between May and October 2018, AGFA continued to execute major restoration projects. The most significant projects advanced were as follows:

- A) Chemical Warfare plotting room overpressure system. For the Coast Defense Days event in May 2018, AGFA had fully completed the Decontamination Chamber with its associated blower motor and assemblies. The second major component of this system is the plotting room overpressure and filtration system. Through the summer months we worked on the system and by early October we had the motor in place, fully functional, with all required electrical switching equipment.
- B) Gun #1 traversing gear system. One of our future programs is implementing a trigonometry experience for the local high school that will use Gun #1, the Battery Commander's station and another station (to be identified in the future) to actually execute a trigonometry instructional program. As of May 2018, Gun #1 had over three degrees of "play" - unsuitable for accurate mathematical calculations. During the summer the AGFA team tightened the traversing system by (1) designing and installing new nuts to eliminate lateral movement and (2) figured out how to tighten the traversing gears as outlined in the technical manual to further eliminate lateral play. The team was able to reduce the lateral play from three degrees to about a quarter of a degree.

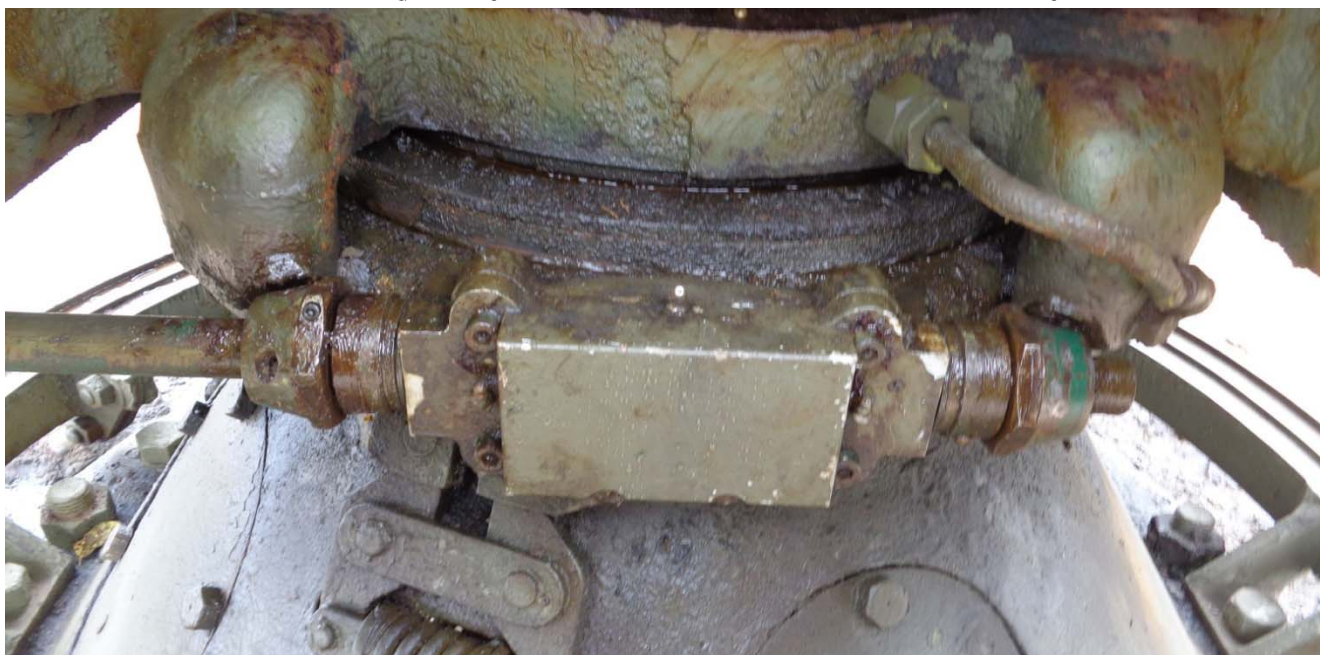
The two photos below show the Chemical Warfare mechanical room as completed to October 2018. All that is remaining to be done is install the reproduction filter and valves. This will result in the "x" cap being replaced by a pipe to the filter and the lower 90 degree elbow being replaced by the filter valve housing. Otherwise, this assembly is complete. The left photo shows the over pressure motor (lower) and decontamination blower motor (upper right). The photo on the right shows the control system for the over pressure motor and the receptacle for the room. With the exception of a few pipe sections, all parts are vintage 1930s and 1940s material.



The photo below provides a more expansive view of the chemical warfare system's electrical system in its final installed configuration. All components are vintage from the 1930s and fully functional.



Part of the traversing mechanism is shown below. The box shown below encloses the traversing worm gear on the shaft. Learning how to adjust the various nuts and fixtures shown below has greatly reduced lateral movement in the system.



Throughout the day on Friday, we performed basic maintenance and preparations. Below TSGT Weaver cleans out the gutters on the top of the battery. Notice the new ammunition service bridge and the open doors to the ammunition hoist.



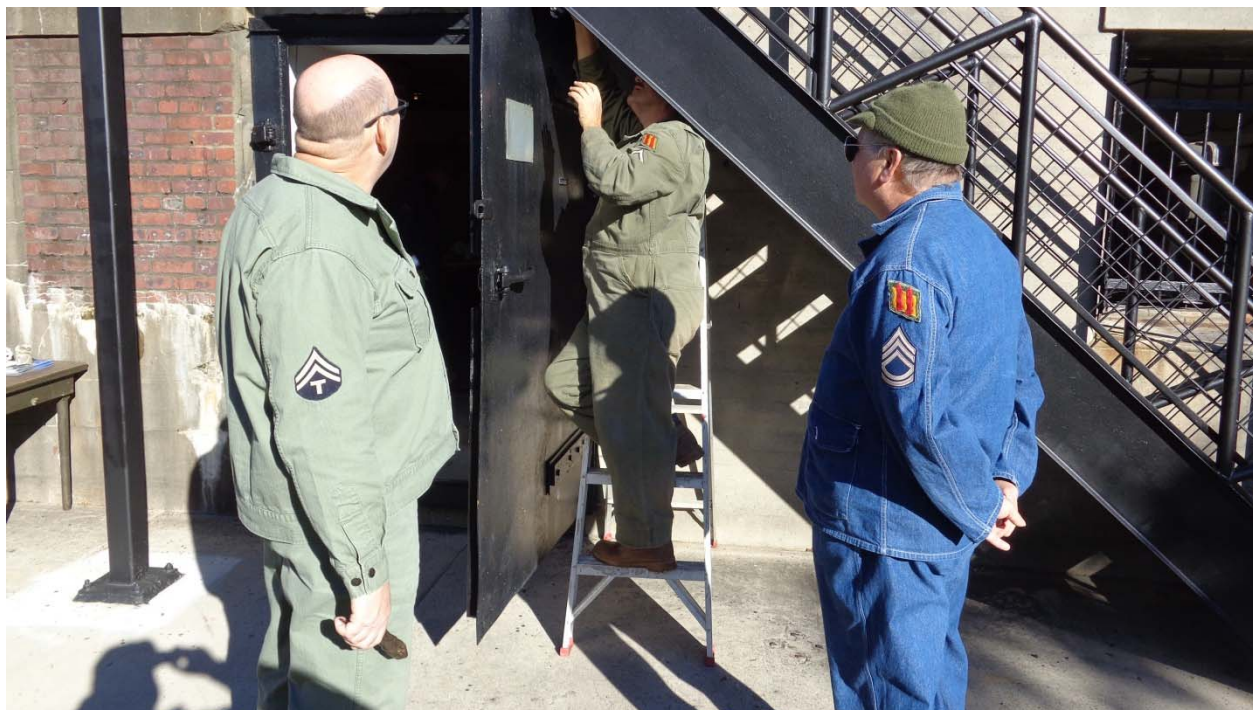
Below 1LT Bennett uses the "shop vacuum" to get at the dust and leaves in the battery magazine.



Another major change for AGFA is a storage CONEX (storage container) provided by the National Park Service. Below 1LT Bennett and PFC Tunison inspect the items AGFA has already moved to the CONEX.



Another project is to design and install a door latch to hold the plotting room door open. PFC Tunison takes measurements and evaluates options with TSGT Weaver and T-5 Ciemniecki assisting in developing options.



Setting up the Gun #1 platform is a major Friday task for the team. Below 2LT Still, CPL Cusano, 1LT Bennett and SGT Egan continue the preparations for the evening lantern tour.



Below 2LT Still, TSGT Weaver and CPL Cusano continue moving equipment to the platform for Gun #1.



Outfitting the Battery Commander's Station is another priority. Below SGT Egan mounts the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument while LTC Welch connects the two EE-91 telephones to the communications system prior to mounting them in the telephone niche.



2LT Still and 1LT Bennett discuss manning the Battery Commander's Station while SGT Egan completes the mounting and orientation of the M1910A1 azimuth instrument.



For Fort Hancock Days, the shell and powder magazines are separated from the Coast Guard and Chaplains displays. The wooden partitions prevent access. Notice the large yellow 16-inch projectile along the back of the wooden. The Coast Guard display is on the other side of the partition.



The Coast Guard section explains how the USCG managed the entrance process with the Army and Navy during World War II.



The powder magazine was partitioned for the Chaplain's displays. The majority of the Chaplain display provided the partition. Below CPT(CH) Uhler stands by ready to receive visitors during the Lantern Tour.



The other side of the Chaplain's display was the majority of the powder magazine. The table to the left actually has the evening meal warming on a Coleman 500 speed master stove from 1940.



Within the Chemical Warfare mechanical room, 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano assemble their medical displays.



Several major medical items are on display including a 1943 Picker Field X-Ray machine. The Chemical warfare motors and blowers are behind the X-Ray machine.



Below are two views of the completed medical display area within the Chemical Warfare mechanical room.



One major change for the visiting public will be how they enter the plotting room. For the first time, the public will receive information on the chemical warfare system, then proceed through the decontamination vault into the plotting room. Below 2LT Cusano looks through the doorway to the plotting room. The board on the floor is to prevent the public from tripping on the lip of the metal doorway.



At about 1600 hours, the team gathered in the powder magazine for the evening meal. 1LT Taylor and 1LT Bennett chat while SGT Egan and TSGT Weaver eat and listen.



At the base of Gun #1 platform, CPL Cusano, 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse eat dinner.



Right after dinner, the team gathered inside the plotting room to finalize for the Lantern Tour.



PVT Budjos, 2LT Cusano and T-4 King pause in note taking during the discussion.



As we prepared for the lantern tour, the team took a group photo behind the Battery' Commander's Station.



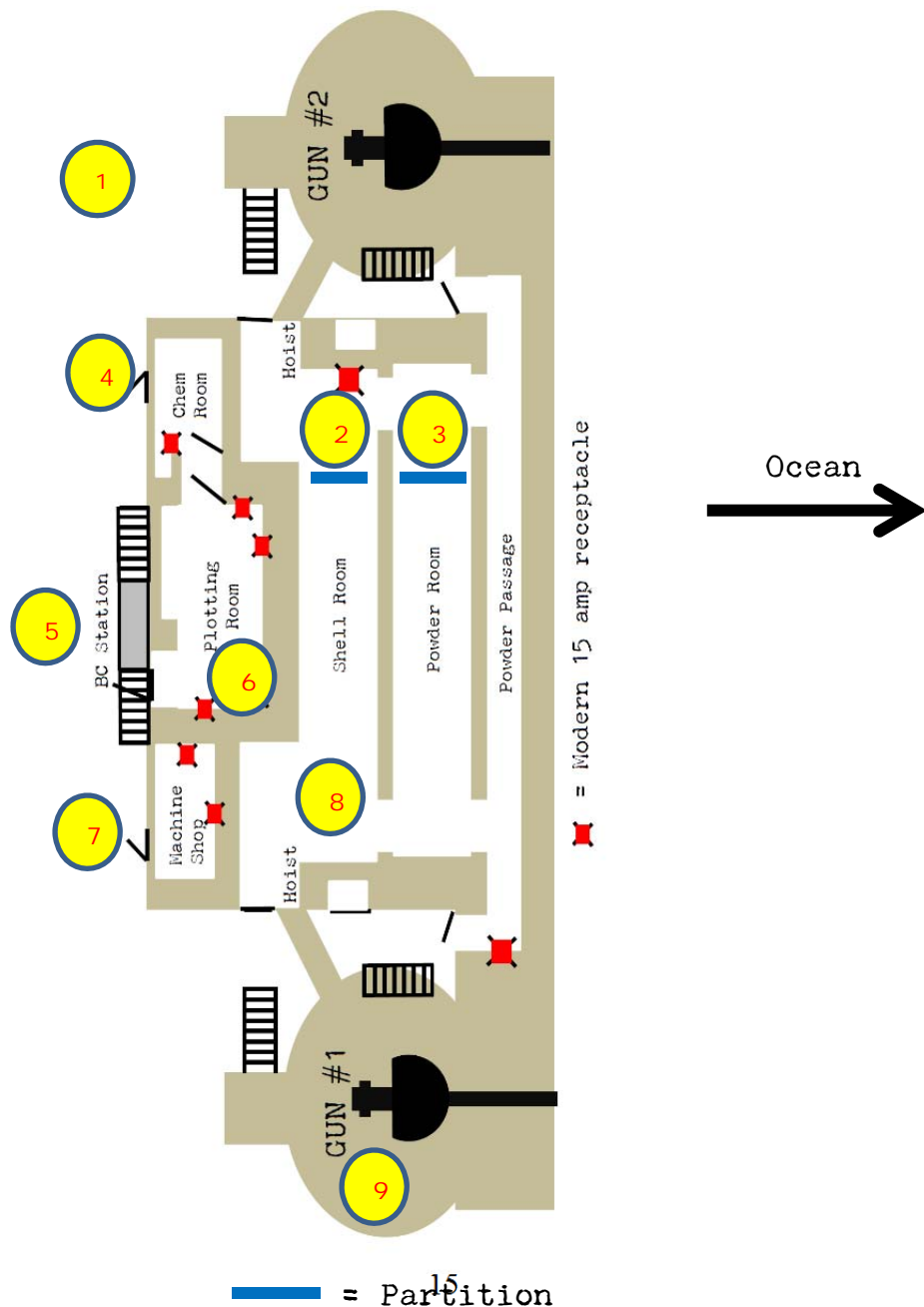
Right after we took the picture, other members began to arrive. 1LT Winslow on the left arrived in WWI period uniform - commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the end of World War One. CPT(CH) Uhler arrives from the barracks on his 1940s bike.



During the lantern tour, AGFA developed a "station" approach with nine separate locations for interpretation. The stations are listed below and are shown in the diagram by their number in a yellow oval.

- a. Station #1 (Entrance/Check Point for the tour)
- b. Station #2 (USCG and Navy Support to HDNY)
- c. Station #3 (Chaplain)
- d. Station #4 (Medical - Chemical Warfare room)
- e. Station #5 (Battery Commander's Station)
- f. Station #6 (Plotting Room)
- g. Station #7 (Machine Shop)
- h. Station #8 (Magazine - ammunition)
- i. Station #9 (Gun #1)

The plan as executed created eight groups of about 12 visitors each at Station #1. We then started each group at one of the eight interpretation stations. We changed stations every 10 minutes using the Fire Control Telephone system to announce the change. Because we used the telephone system, we were able to both announce the change (ringing) and confirm movement via voice communication.



The Harbor Defense Lantern Tour started at 1830 and promptly moved to the shells near the Sandy Hook Light house. At this point there were about 100 attendees.



Another view of our visitors shows the size of the group.



Below SGT Egan speaks to the group as we prepared to enter the Harbor Defense Command Post (HDCP) or "Mortar Battery" area. He is using an Army "bull horn" which is very helpful when the group is large.



SGT Egan carries the "bull horn" as we move along the side of the HDCP on the way to Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck.



We arrived at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck and created eight groups out of the approximately 100 visitors. Below the groups head out to their stations.



Each group was comprised of about 11 to 12 people. 1LT Lutkenhouse stands at the entrance to the medical/chemical warfare station.



LT(jg) Casalese (USCGR) explains harbor movement management by the USCG to the lantern tour visitors.



CPT(CH) Uhler explains the Army's Chaplaincy Programs to visitors.



The night was very dark and the extensive exterior lighting was a major help. Below visitors move between stations.



1LT Bennett explains the M1910A1 azimuth instrument in the Battery Commander's station. He is focused on the bright lights of New York City.



T-4 (Technical Sergeant Fourth Grade) Komorowski explains the machine shop to visitors. He has a project underway on the lathe.



A more direct view of the lathe shows the project underway. T-4 Komorowski is explaining the main purposes of the machine shop to visitors.



A simple but important project was T-4 King's new "window" insert for the machine shop. The Plexiglas window keeps the cold air out and allows visibility both in and out of the shop and most importantly, blocks the cold winds of winter!



A view of T-4 Komorowski through the doorway into the machine shop.



In the medical room, 1LT Lutkenhouse demonstrates the Kreiselman resuscitator to the public.



When the signal was given to change stations, inside the medical station PVT Budjos begin explaining the purpose of the Chemical Warfare M1A1 Collective Protector.



PVT Budjos explains the decontamination air lock that is part of the M1A1 Collective Protector to the visitors.



1LT Lutkenhouse assists PVT Budjos in guiding the visitors through the decontamination air lock and into the plotting room.



Visitors move between the Medical/Chemical warfare station into the plotting room through the decontamination air lock.



Once inside the plotting room, 1LT Taylor and 1LT Winslow provide an overview of how the plotting room functions generating firing data for the guns.



Inside the magazine, PFC Tunison and TSGT Weaver provide information on ammunition storage and management.



TSGT Weaver explains the differences between armor piercing and high explosive projectiles to our visitors.



On the Gun #1 Platform, 2LT Still and the team prepare for a night gun drill.



Below SSG Minton explains the gun and SGT Egan and CPL Cusano prepare for their parts of the presentation.



SGT Egan explains the fire control telephone system to the visitors.



As SGT Egan explains the HS-33 head/chest set, he shows the visitors its modern day counterpart - the head set for a modern smart telephone!



Below from left to right 2LT Still, SSG Minton and SGT Egan prepare for a gun drill.



SSG Minton opens the breach block as SGT Egan explains the purpose of the Obturator and how the block seals during firing. A young lady visitor looks on from the gun pointer's platform.



Below the gun crew prepares for a drill. On the right is SGT Meiselman in a WWI uniform representing the 57th Coast Artillery Company at Fort Hancock in 1918.



SGT Egan opens the breach block in preparation for a drill.



Below is Gun #1 and its crew preparing for a drill. The lights on the gun carriage proper are a historic system we assembled a few years ago.



A side view of the Gun #1 showing its azimuth indicator, sight and elevation lights clearly. The New York City skyline is in the background.



Saturday morning came early and we prepared for our day of meetings and the annual dinner. Below SGT Meiselman talks with Mrs. Brodzinski as Linda Houck, 1LT Lutkenhouse and SSG Houck chat along the wall and CPT(CH) Uhler enjoys breakfast.



The team below sits down for breakfast and prepares for the day's events. From left to right is SGT Meiselman, Mrs. Brodzinski, 1LT Lutkenhouse, Mrs. Komorowski, SSG Houck and 2LT Still.



Later in the morning, the AGFA board held its annual meeting in the plotting room at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck. Below SSG Houck listens attentively as T-4 Brodzinski makes a key point.



Below 1LT Bennett, 1LT Taylor, and SSG Minton review points on the agenda.



At noon we began our Annual Meeting. TSGT Weaver is attired in a reproduction 1940s baseball uniform of the 245th Coast Artillery Regiment.



As we prepare for our break, TSGT Weaver shows the sleeve markings of the baseball uniform.



After our meeting, we took a group photo outside of Bldg #41 barracks.



After the meeting, we gathered with Pete McCarthy, Sandy Hook Unit Manager, to review several key safety and operational points. We do this annually with Pete to further improve our operating position with our partner, the National Park Service.



1LT Lutkenhouse, SGT Meiselman, T-4 Brodzinski, T-4 Komorowski and TSGT Weaver listen attentively to Pete as he outlines key issues.



Below TSGT Weaver, CPT(Dr) Cusano, 2LT Cusano, 1LT Taylor, 2LT Still and SSG Minton participate in the meeting.



After the meeting, 2LT Gonzalez begins work on an M1904 3-inch telescopic sight for the 6-inch M1900 guns.



2LT Gonzales explains the prism and eye piece and how they function in the sight. He is a skilled optical technician who has made a career out of maintaining optical instruments.



In the evening we gathered at Bldg #77, a restored 1941 dining hall used by the Marine Academy of Science and Technology (MAST), a specialized high school. Monmouth County graciously allows AGFA as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization to use this facility for our annual dinner.



Below, Mrs. Daphne Yun, a Public Affairs Officer for Gateway National Recreation Area, has just passed through our buffet line for dinner. Our meal was catered by Francesco's Restaurant at (732) 872-0080 (www.francescositalianrestaurant.com). They have been catering our meals for the past three years and have done an outstanding job!



Below members and guests gather for great food and camaraderie.



1LT Lutkenhouse chats with Lillian Burry, the Deputy Chair of the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders (county board).



2LT Still and TSGT Weaver smile for the camera as other members and guests chat in the background.



2LT Cusano and Mrs. Gonzalez have enjoyed a great meal as conversations continue.



T-5 Ciemniecki, 1LT Taylor and CPT(CH) Uhler chat with 2LT Still as 1LT Lutkenhouse and Lillian Burry chat in the background and PFC Tunison, Mrs. Tunison and 2LT Gonzalez chat on the left.



More camaraderie with CPT(Dr) Cusano, 2LT Gonzalez, Mrs. Tunison, PFC Tunison, Mrs. Gonzalez and 2LT Cusano.



Jennifer Nersesian, Superintendent of Gateway National Recreation Area, speaks to our members and guests.



All of our attending members and guests gathered for a photo at the conclusion of our Annual Dinner.



Sunday morning arrived bright and early! Below 1LT Bennett, SSG Minton, CPL Cusano, 2LT Still and 1LT Taylor have breakfast and discuss the upcoming day.



We took about 15 minutes and participated in a non-denominational service lead by CPT(CH) Uhler - an ordained minister.



Once we arrived at the battery, we quickly began work. SGT Egan prepares the gun platform below. Notice the soldier's field equipment and weapons on the rifle rack. This was normal practice at coast artillery gun batteries during WWII.



Below provides a view of Gun #1 platform from the Battery Commander's station as members continue to bring equipment up to the platform.



Below SGT Egan, PVT Budjos and SSG Minton read the 14 October 1943 edition of the "Sandy Hook Fog Horn" - the Fort Hancock weekly paper.



SGT Egan remounts and orients the M1910A1 azimuth instrument as 1LT Bennett and 2LT Gonzales finish preparing the station. This M1910A1 was manufactured in 1941 at Frankford Arsenal in Philadelphia.



Below members of the public are up in the Battery Commander's Station as SGT Minton puts out "Harbor Defense Open House" banner across the back railing of the station.



Another view of the station as members of the public enjoy the view.



A visitor looks through the M1910A1 instrument's telescope at the Coney Island Jump Tower.



Our visitor's view of the jump tower is shown below. This was an actual orientation point for the fire control system during WWII as recorded in the Battery Emplacement book from 1946.



During the day, 2LT Gonzalez, 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse provided visitors with a full appreciation of the medical advances of the time as well as the Chemical Warfare M1A1 Collective Protective System.



Visitors chat with the nurses in the Chemical Warfare/medical exhibit room.



1LT Lutkenhouse explains a splint from WWII.



In the plotting room, 1LT Taylor demonstrates how a soldier would have plotted a target on the plotting board.



Below the public watches 1LT Taylor as he plots on the board.



The M1905 Deflection Board below was the last instrument used before deflection (or azimuth) was sent to the guns from the plotting room. The board sits on a table with an image of the M1 Deflection board that is laminated on the top of the table. This board was made in about 1910 at Frankford Arsenal in Philadelphia.



The "Wind Component Indicator" below was made at Frankford Arsenal and was used to determine the impact of wind upon the flight of a projectile.



The EE-86 Time Interval Apparatus below is from 1943 and is operating the time interval bell system throughout the battery. The lid to the device is removed so the public can watch it operate.



On the Gun #1 platform, gun crew CPL Cusano, TSGT Weaver, 2LT Still, PVT Budjos and SGT Egan pose just as visitors began arriving. Gun #1 is an M1900 6-inch rifle serial number 23 manufactured at Watervliet Arsenal, in Albany, NY in 1903.



Below SGT Egan discussed the loading operation as 2LT Still and PVT Budjos prepare for their roles in the loading drill.



CPL Cusano holds the “drill projectile extraction rod” after completion of the gun drill.



Below a gun drill in progress - CPL Cusano has just “swabbed” the chamber for “burning embers” as two visitors bring the shell tray to the breach. SGT Egan stands to the right of the shell team with a powder bag.



Below LTC Welch seats the rammer head onto the base of the shell in preparation to ram it into the forcing cone of the gun tube.



As CPL Cusano looks on, LTC Welch puts the rammer head on the base of the powder bag head held by SGT Egan as 2LT Still observes and PVT Budjos prepares to close the breach block.



Below PVT Budjos inserts the inert "primer" into the M1900 firing device (also reproduction).



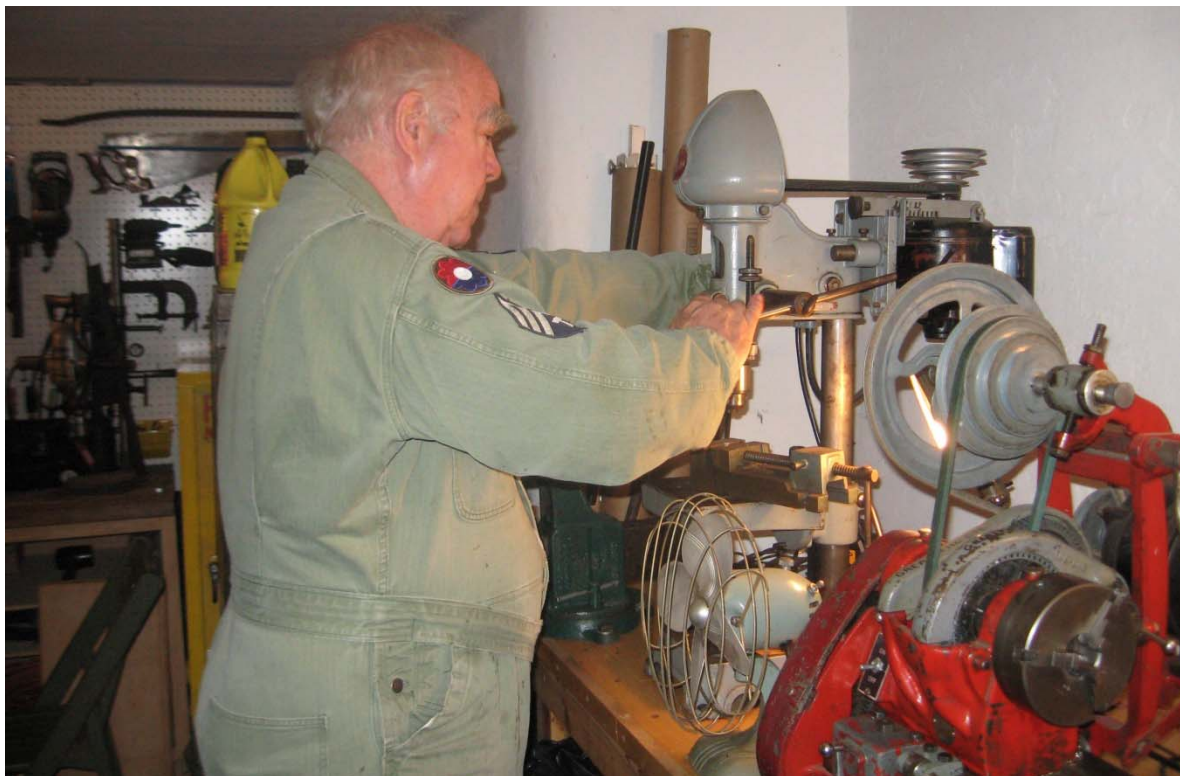
Looking through the M1904 3-inch telescopic sight on the 6-inch M1900 rifle our visitors could see the maritime bridge over in Brooklyn (near Fort Tilden).



While gun drills were on going, TSgt Weaver explains how powder is stored and managed in the magazine.



T-4 King uses the drill press in a demonstration for the public.



During a break in visitation, CPT(CH) Uhler stands by his display.



With a couple of free minutes, 2LT Gonzalez and CPT(CH) Uhler play a few tunes on the field organ.



As the day wound down, LTC Welch took a few minutes on the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument in the battery commander's station.



By 1600 in the afternoon, there were many boats and ships moving in and out of New York Harbor. A small fishing boat is seen below with a sail boat in the background. 2LT Gonzalez cleaned and adjusted these instruments, resulting in a wonderfully clear view.



Another view of LTC Welch looking through the M1910A1 instrument in the Battery Commander's Station.



This view shows a large container ship entering Ambrose channel and a small yacht moving to the right.



As we finished the day, we packed away our materials. Below 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse pack up the medical displays.



To prepare for our next project, PVT Budjos places the M1904 sight mount on a table for paint stripping and repair over the winter.



Throughout the winter of 2018-19, AGFA members and US National Park Rangers will be conducting work periods at Battery Gunnison/ New Battery Peck. On December 15th and 16th AGFA will be co-hosting the "Fort Hancock World War II Christmas" at History House. For additional information, call the National Park's Visitor Center at (732) 872-5970, visit <https://www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/index.htm> or visit the Army Ground Forces Association Website at <http://armygroundforces.org>. Additional information and scheduling can also be found at "Battery John Gunnison-New Freemont Peck" at <https://www.facebook.com/Battery-John-Gunnison-168775819848014/>