

Coast Artillery Living History
Fort Hancock, NJ

On 16-18 May 2014, the National Park Service (NPS), in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) and other historic and scientific organizations, conducted the annual spring Coastal Defense Day weekend across the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark. Coastal Defense Day showcases Fort Hancock's rich military heritage thru tours and programs at various locations throughout Sandy Hook.

This was the first full public event for AGFA at Battery Gunnison/New Peck since before Hurricane Sandy in October 2012. The last full event occurred in May 2012 - a full two years have elapsed since the last major public event.

Army Ground Forces Association concentrated its efforts at Battery Gunnison/New Peck, which from February to May 1943 was undergoing a significant conversion and armament upgrade. The members of AGFA that participated in the event were Ron and Yvonne Brodzinski, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Chris Egan, Kathleen Kluxen, Henry and Mary Komorowski, Anne Lutkenhouse, Eric Meiselman, Tom Minton, Kyle Schaffer, Paul Taylor, Gary and Deanna Weaver, Shawn Welch and guests Tony Antonucci, Paul Casalese, Joe DiGiovanni, Phil Hillman, Richard King, Doug Kopin and Bill Winslow. In addition, we had a very special guest, Ms. Beatrice Bernzott, who provided a wonderful display and interpretation of "Rosie the Riveter" on Sunday, 18 May.

The educational objective was to provide interpretation of the Coast Artillery mission at Fort Hancock in the World War Two-era with a focus on the movement of the two 6" rapid fire M1900 guns from Battery Peck to Battery Gunnison in April and May 1943 - creating Battery Gunnison/New Peck! The guns were moved to this site so as to give them a greater field of fire in the defense of New York Harbor. 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 Battery Gunnison/New Peck played as Advance HECP #1's Examination Battery.

The photo below shows the majority of the participants on Sunday, 18 May in front of Gun #1 of Battery Gunnison/New Peck. This day was the full NPS "Coastal Defense Day" weekend long event at Battery Gunnison/New Peck since May 2012.



AGFA members began arriving on Thursday evening in worsening weather conditions. One of the unique aspects of staying at the Fort after hours is getting to experience many unique views, such as this haunting image of the Lighthouse, emanating its rays in dense fog and rain.



Preparations for the weekend quickly got underway on Friday. In the photo below, CPL Meiselman, PVT Schaffer and SSG Weaver prepare the water cooler and coffee pot for movement to Battery Gunnison.



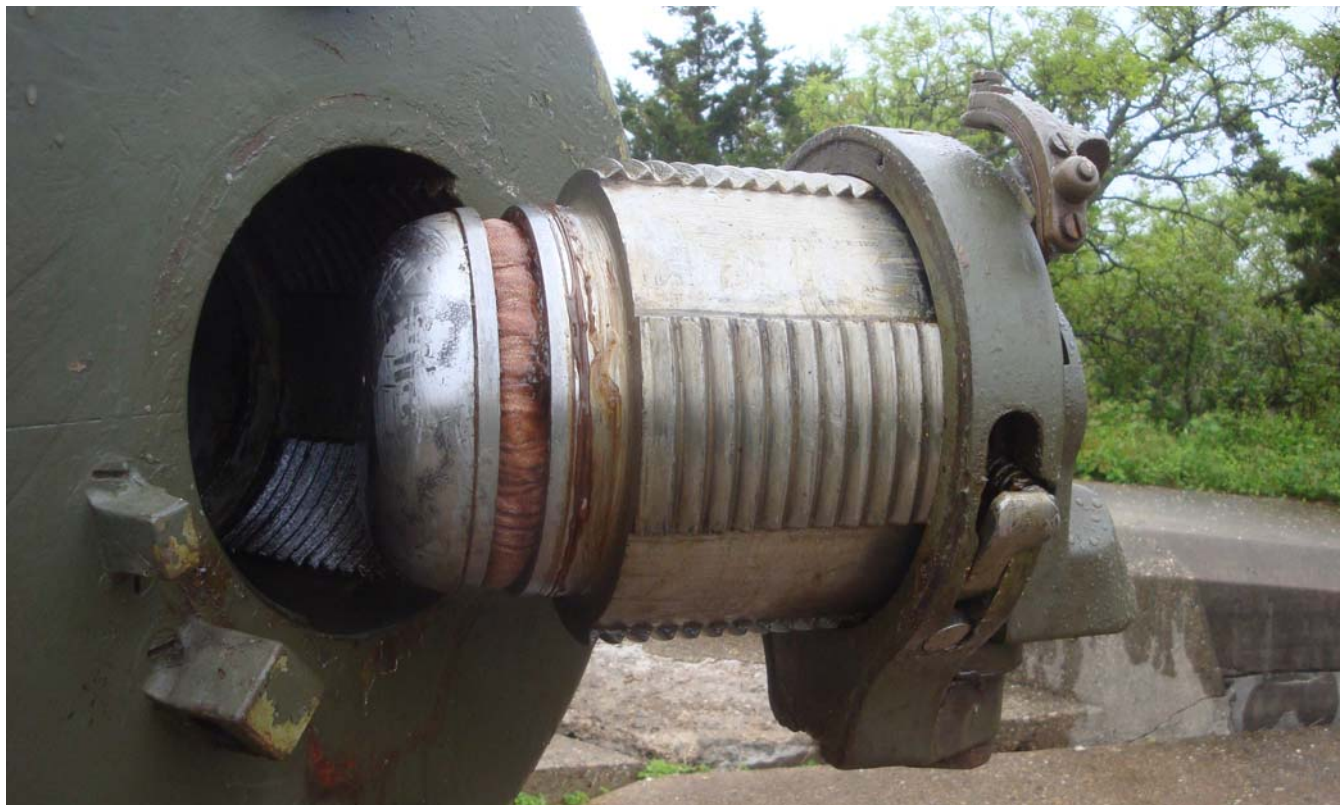
There were many tasks undertaken in preparation for the event. One of the first was to assemble and install a new obturator pad in the Gun No. #1 breach block. In the photo below, PVT Schaffer and CPL Meiselman take a break from the work as a light rain falls. To our chagrin, it didn't remain light for very long.



As the rain picked up, the final assembly of the obturator rings and pad took place inside the Gun No. 1 magazine entrance. The photo below shows the spindle assembled prior to its return to the breach block.



The photo below shows the obturator spindle with the new pad installed. A new pad was required as the old pad was too thin to properly seat the spindle for use with the M1900 Firing Device during gun drills. This new pad is assembled using hemp rope wrapped with ace bandages and filled with grease. This pad will not collapse or hold water as the old pad did in the past. At some point during the summer, a final layer of ace bandage will be applied to bring the pad flush with the obturator rings, making it a very accurate reproduction.



Another major task was battery cleanup. Below PVT Schaffer, CPL Meiselman, and PFC Cusano tackle the job of hauling off loose cement and other debris.



Other preparations included SGT Minton posting our "Open For Business" sign.



One of the major issues we discovered on Friday was that both dehumidifiers in the magazine were no longer operative. We opened the magazine and discovered significant moisture, as evidenced below in the ceiling of the powder passage. This is, in fact, a historic problem that Coast Artillerymen had to contend with from the early 1800's to the end of the Coast Artillery in 1950. In the photo below, PVT Schaffer has just started a fan in the powder passage to force air circulation. By Saturday afternoon, the moisture on the ceilings was gone.



By noon, lunch was served - a special WWII period-correct hot meal of tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches. In the photo below CPL Meiselman, PVT Schaffer, PFC Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse dig in. The meal is served from early 1940's Army marmites and containers, used to get hot food to troops in the field.



Another view inside the plotting room as food is prepared by Mrs. Weaver and 1LT Lutkenhouse. In the door way, SGT Minton prepares to welcome some visitors.



In the tool room and out of the rain, SGT King and T5 Komorowski begin operating the WWII-era machine shop. In the photo below, they perform "set up" operations on the engraving machine to make data plates for the electric panel box in the Plotting Room.



Below SGT King and T-5 Komorowski adjust the machine in preparation to engrave the brass plates. When not in use, the machines are covered in plastic to ensure they are protected from moisture.



During the afternoon, the nurses began to assemble their displays. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse prepares exhibits and cleans the Chemical Warfare room.



Unveiled to the public was the newest addition to the medical displays - a WWII 1943 Picker Field X-Ray Machine!!! This very unusual addition was donated by Charlie Steen, the owner of SARCO Incorporated, and is a most special addition to the medical interpretation.



Members grab a quick supper just prior to heading out on the Tour. The evening was windy and damp with the approaching rainstorm, and the hot meal was a welcome relief to the Troops, who were preparing for a long and wet night at the Battery.



At the completion of our dinner, members began to prepare their equipment and uniforms for the tour. In the photo below, MAJ Winslow, CPL Meiselman and PVT Schaffer prepare their gear prior to moving out.



LT Taylor is seen below, making a final review with the medical personnel in the Chemical Warfare Room prior to the departure of the lantern tour team.



The photo below shows the Lantern Tour team. The team included CPL Egan, PFC Cusano, SSG Weaver, 2LT Cusano, MAJ Winslow, PVT Schaffer, 1LT Lutkenhouse, LTC Welch, SGT King, CPL Meiselman, T5 Komorowski, SGT Minton and 2LT Taylor. The rain was just beginning to pick up, which is why several members are in rain jackets and trench coats.



Right after the photo above was taken, the rain really started to come down. Below PFC Cusano, CPL Egan, SGT Minton and CPL Meiselman move through the Harbor Defense Command Post inner defense wall to the Guard House and the start of the tour. Since Hurricane Sandy, the NPS has cleared out the vegetation within this area, making it traversable and greatly improving interpretation opportunities.



In the photo below, the soldiers stop to examine the remains of a fire control tower that was demolished in the 1970s. The base is present, as is the metal enclosure for the instrument pier. The rain is very apparent with the wet concrete. Battery McCook/Reynolds, formerly a 12" mortar battery, now serving (circa 1943) as the Harbor Defense Command Post (HDCP). The inside walls are part of the close-in defenses of the command post.



We were quite surprised that we had visitors, even in the driving rain! A troop of Boy Scouts were waiting at the Guard House for the tour to start. Below, SGT Minton and CPL Egan quickly converse as we head out of the first emplacement of the HDCP.



After walking through the HDCP area, we followed the Multi-Use Path to the corner of Atlantic Drive and the Gunnison Beach parking lot. Below, PFC Cusano (holding lantern), PVT Schafer, CPL Egan, SSG Weaver and SGT Minton talk with the public. By this point, the rain had turned to a downpour, and is clearly visible on PFC Cusano's uniform and M1903 rifle stock.



The tour group passed the intersection and moved to Battery Gunnison/New Peck. Once they passed through the guard mount, they were greeted by 2LT Taylor, who gave an overview of Battery Operations (below).



1LT Lutkenhouse and CPL Meiselman prepared to take the tour group into the battery area. 1LT Lutkenhouse wears a rain coat patterned after that issued in WWI, while CPL Meiselman wears a WWII poncho.



The Boy Scout Troop was divided into two groups. Below, one group speaks with 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse in the medical area of the Chemical Warfare room.



Next to the Chemical Warfare room, T5 Komorowski began a discussion on how the Plotting Room operated. T5 Hillman, representing the 113th Regimental Combat Team, an Infantry support unit to Ft Hancock, and CPL Egan are to the left and the level of wetness from the rain is very apparent.



As discussions continued in the plotting room and medical area, CPL Meiselman and PVT Schaffer prepared the gun platform in the driving rain. The two restored platform lights are plainly visible in this photograph.



Below T5 Komorowski and SGT King explain the workings of the Machine Shop to our visitors.



In the powder magazine, CPL Egan explains care of seacoast cannon gunpowder as PFC Cusano and PVT Schaffer look on. The level of moisture is very apparent on the ceiling. It took all day Saturday to reduce the level of moisture in the battery.



Rain notwithstanding, the Scouts thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and we completed the tour at about 2200 hours and returned to the barracks. In the photo below a soaked yet motivated SGT Minton brings his footlocker into his room.



Saturday morning dawned clear and sunny. Mrs. "Mess Sergeant" Weaver hustled the breakfast meal as we were due at Battery Lewis in Monmouth County's Hartshorne Woods Park at 0900 (<http://www.monmouthcountyparks.com/Page.aspx?ID=2524>). Here, 2LT Taylor and CPL Egan prepare to receive breakfast on vintage 1940's Army mess equipment.



The barracks we used is Bldg 41 at Fort Hancock - a WWII-era wooden building originally used as a post office. The open dining area is a major plus, as shown below as MAJ Winslow eats in comfort on the couch as PFC Cusano and PVT Schaffer prepare to eat as well.



Monmouth County Supervising Historic Preservation Specialist Gail Hunton (in black shirt below) conducted an overview of Battery Lewis (2 x 16-inch guns) for Monmouth County Park System senior leaders and Monmouth County Freeholders. In the photo below, AGFA members and members of Monmouth County Parks prepare to tour the inside of the Battery. Note the massive size of the casemate for 16-inch gun #2 behind the group.



Monmouth County has ambitious plans for Battery Lewis and planning of major restoration work is in progress. Some work has been completed such as the exterior concrete surfaces have been beautifully restored. Planning is underway to bring a 16-inch gun tube to Emplacement #1 and install it on a concrete simulated carriage. Interpretation plans are currently being drafted and the idea factory is churning overtime!



Before the tour of the battery, Gail and the park staff conducted an overview of Battery Lewis and the project(s) as executed and envisioned. Many outstanding documents and handouts were available.



In addition to AGFA members, the leadership of Monmouth County listened intently as Gail outlined current accomplishments and future plans.



Prior to entering the Battery proper and just within the Gun #2 casemate, LTC Welch and Gail Hunton provide an overview to the Freeholders and other guests, explaining its role in protecting the 16" gun and its crew. The massive size of the casemate is very evident below.



AGFA members and the other guests have just entered the Battery from the Loading Tunnel, which is directly behind them. This was the first time that nearly everyone on the tour had ever been inside the Army's largest seacoast battery. They were in awe of the massive size of the structure. In the foreground, SSG Weaver examines the cable run, which once held a large number of electric and telephone lines.



Once inside the cavernous structure of Battery Lewis, AGFA members discussed the condition of the battery, the many historic items still remaining, and options for the Future with the Freeholders. Below, the commander of Earle Naval Weapons Station (CAPT Richard C. Valentine) is in discussion with AGFA members 2LT Cusano, 1LT Lutkenhouse and SGT King concerning options for restoration and interpretation.



Below Gail Hunton and 2LT Cusano discuss various options for interpretation as T5 Komorowski surveys the area of Emplacement #1. 16" guns were the largest weapons in the US Coast Defense inventory - there is nothing small about this Battery.



The size of a 16-inch seacoast gun is apparent in the excavated gun well inside the emplacement. SGT Minton, MAJ Winslow and others stand in awe at its large size. A key aspect of the restoration is the installation of a surplus Navy Mk-7 16-inch gun tube on a concrete mount in the same position as the WWII mounted Mk-II Army (Navy manufactured) gun tube. This is a substantial improvement that will greatly improve interpretation for both Battery Lewis (Hartshorne Park) and Fort Hancock National Historic Landmark (Sandy Hook Unit) Gateway National Recreation Area.



The tour traversed the entire length of the Battery to the No. 1 Casemate, some 500 feet from where the group entered. Here, LTC Welch and SSG Weaver discuss the excavation work of the gun pit with the tour group.



As members walk through the battery's main corridor, the immense size of the structure is very apparent. AGFA members answered a host of questions from the Freeholders about Battery Lewis, the Harbor Defense of NY, and technical aspects of the Coast Artillery as well.



The freeholders and other tour group members asked a multitude of questions of AGFA members, from the role the Battery to the type of work needed to restore it. Here, LTC Welch explains the functions of a surviving WWII-era Crouse & Hines electrical panel, and how it can be repaired and reused as the Battery is brought back to life.



Below, are original air-tight doors that lead into the shell and powder magazines, a large latrine area, and several tool rooms.



Around 1230 on Saturday, the membership had arrived back at Battery Gunnison/New Peck and were immediately engaged by the public. In the photo below, 2LT Taylor provides background on plotting room operations to visitors.



Throughout the day on Saturday, the visitors streamed into the battery. Below two families learn about the plotting room from 2LT Taylor and MAJ Winslow.



Saturday was a combination of work and interpretation. Below, 1LT Lutkenhouse is preparing to get equipment from the tool room as Miss Kluxen paints a dehumidifier stand Olive Drab and 2LT Cusano discusses medical aspects with a seated visitor at the far end of the Battery Parade (third open door behind 1LT Lutkenhouse).



Throughout the afternoon, AGFA members conducted gun drills to prepare for Sunday. The public presence was significant throughout the day.



Below, SSG Weaver, SGT Minton and PFC Cusano work with members of the Boy Scout troop that joined us for the lantern tour as they learn how to load the M1900 6-inch rifle.



The Boy Scouts spent a significant amount of time learning gun drills with the AGFA team. Note the EE-91 telephone on the concrete and the cable to the headset on SSG Weaver who is serving as the gun pointer and looking back at the "crew".



Multiple drills were conducted and it was discovered that since the use of a firing device is now incorporated into the breach block portion of the drill, the time to load the gun has increased to the point where making the 15 second time interval is very difficult without a full gun crew. This change was the subject of significant conversation on Saturday evening at the barracks.



As members worked on the Gun #1 Platform, interpretation in the plotting room was provided by 2LT Taylor with the assistance of SGT King and T5 Komorowski.



In the photo below, 2LT Taylor demonstrates the fully operational EE-91 telephones and the HS-17 head and chest sets with the public. On the plotting table to the right of 2LT Taylor is a WWII era circular slide rule for solving right triangles in Coast Artillery fire-control equations.



On Friday afternoon, SSG Weaver spent time studying the Lubrication Order for the M1900 6-inch guns looking for the "Thrust Bearing" oil point for the M1900 seacoast rifle carriages. On Saturday afternoon, he discovered it, and started to oil the traversing mechanism of Gun No. 2.



Gun #2 has not traversed freely since 2004 - 10 years! However, as SSG Weaver applied oil to the thrust bearing, members CPL Egan, SGT Minton, LTC Welch, PFC Cusano, T4 Brodzinski, and CPL Meiselman succeeded in traversing the gun 360 degrees. Each time the gun was traversed manually, it improved in ease of traverse. Though more work remains to be done, this is a huge step forward to returning Gun #2 to a serviceable (for interpretation) status.



While members were working on Gun #2, T5 Komorowski and SGT King worked diligently on the machines in the tool room.



Below, SGT King makes adjustments to the Atlas Milling Machine.



Within the tool room there is now an Atlas Lathe, Milling Machine, drill press and engraving machine.



Below is the engraving machine - a key item for fabricating fire control instruments for Battery Gunnison/New Peck's continuing restoration.



The milling machine below is another major addition to the machine shop.



The Atlas Lathe shown below is a very historic item. It came from the Linden, NJ General Motors plant that manufactured US Navy F4F Wildcat fighters during WWII. This particular lathe was used to turn landing gear struts for the fighters.



Back up on the gun platform, SGT Minton tracks a ship in the channel with the M1904 telescopic sight as MAJ Winslow and T4 Brodzinski look on..



Seen here through the M1904 telescopic sight is the cruise ship that SGT Minton is tracking. It is outbound on the Ambrose Channel, and is about to drop off the Harbor Pilot to the Station Vessel, seen to the right of the cruise liner itself. Since the 1600's, and even in the age of satellites and radar, the Harbor Pilots continue to safely guide vessels in and out of New York Harbor.



The photo below was taken at the end of the day on Saturday, just prior to heading back to the barracks for the evening meal and a recap of the day's efforts.



Once we arrived back at the barracks, Mrs. Weaver (in red apron with crossed knife/spoon and shell emblem signifying her as Mrs. Mess Sergeant) begins the evening meal with Mrs. Brodzinski, Mrs. Komorowski, 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse looking on as T4 Brodzinski works at the stove.



As always, the meal prepared by Mrs. Weaver and team was a huge success as can be seen by the smiles on the faces of T5 Komorowski and 2LT Taylor.



Dinner is always a special time to be able to unwind and regroup over a piping hot and well-earned meal, which in this case, was lasagna. As the conversation turned to how productive we had been with completing our projects, we also reflected that we'd have a very busy day ahead of us in the morning. One of the major discussions that occurred was how to improve the timing of the gun drills and what interval should be used for the time system - 15 or 20 seconds. We solved it at 20 seconds and revised the gun drill on Sunday to accommodate the new timing.



As dinner ended, we were treated to one of the nicest facets of Fort Hancock - the quiet evenings and amazing sunsets. Seen below are the Post Guardhouse and Main Post Flagpole at dusk. It is moments like these that we all cherish, being privileged to be part of bringing Fort Hancock's amazing history back to life.



KP (Kitchen Police) is an important factor to meal time, and SGT Minton, CPL Egan, and PFC Cusano begin work on the dishes as Mrs. Komorowski heads over to the stove for a last minute check.



Sunday morning dawned early, and below, the team prepares for the day with a hearty breakfast. From left to right clockwise from the left, is 1LT Lutkenhouse, Miss Kluxen, SGT Minton, T4 Brodzinski, Mrs. Brodzinski, LT(jg) Casalese, T5 Komorowski, Mrs. Komorowski and 2LT Cusano.



After we arrived at Battery Gunnison at 1100 hours on Sunday, Ms. Beatrice Bernzott arrived with her "Rosie the Riveter" display. At 85 years old, she knew many of the real-life Rosies and was personally familiar with the Linden, NJ General Motors plant. AGFA members quickly helped to set up her displays.



Below, Ms. Bernzott poses with some younger visitors, ensuring that the legacy of “The Greatest Generation,” will not soon be forgotten.



Throughout the day, Miss Bernzott discussed the work of the ladies of WWII with visitors inside the gun battery.



Below is one of her charts providing a glimpse into the work of the Linden NJ plant and the women who worked at the plant.



On the Gun #1 platform, "BG Philip Gage" (BG DiGiovanni) and MAJ Kopin learn about the 6-inch M1900 seacoast rifle from SGT Minton. BG DiGiovanni provided the public with insight into the actual BG Gage's work at Fort Hancock. Having read the extensively detailed oral history of BG Gage and reading many Ft. Hancock "FogHorn" newspapers, he was well equipped for discussions.



While on the gun platform, the soldiers had to be ready for any "Nazi" incursions. CPL Egan drinks from his canteen as he stands over the rifle rack with at least six M1903 Springfield rifles and a M1927 "Tommy Gun" (all inoperable or replicas). The soldiers at Fort Hancock in 1943 were required to have their individual weapons within 15 second reach at all times.



The gun platform was very full with visitors throughout the day. AGFA members at all the stations were constantly on the move throughout the afternoon. As evidenced below, BG DiGiovanni looks on approvingly from the right as his Coast Artillerymen prepare to run yet another gun drill for the public.



Visitors continued to arrive throughout the afternoon in large and small groups. Here, CPL Meiselman explains the functions and operations of the breechblock to one of the smaller groups of visitors.



Sunday's gun drills were conducted as they would have been done during an alert in 1943. All soldiers had helmets, gas masks and field gear on them or very close by, and rifles were in the rack near the M1900 seacoast rifle.



As always, the public was very interested in the drills, constantly taking pictures, asking questions and participating in the drills themselves.



Around 1330 in the afternoon, Mrs. Weaver and Mrs. Brodzinski arrived with the afternoon meal and served it inside the powder magazine. Below PVT Schaffer and CPL Meiselman prepare to get their chow.



Below Mrs. Komorowski, Mrs. Brodzinski and Mrs. Weaver pause in serving the meal for a photo. The round green container on the floor is an M1940 marmite made in 1942 and a display 16-inch rifle powder bag sits on the table.



Up on the Gun #1 platform, T4 Brodzinski, PVT Schaffer, SGT Minton, CPL Egan and COL Antonucci conducted gun drills as the public both participated and looked on.



Our visiting public participated with gusto in the gun drills. Below SGT Minton, PVT Schaffer, CPL Egan and COL Antonucci participate with the public in the drill.



Below the public energetically loads Gun #1 as AGFA members assist in the effort.



Below a young lady pulls the lanyard on Gun #1, "firing" it as SGT Minton supervises. PVT Schaffer serves as the Elevation Setter and COL Antonucci, while serving as gun pointer, also talks with the public in the plotting room over the HS-33 headset and EE-91 telephone - demonstrating a 70 plus year old system works fine!



The public arrived in groups both large and small. Below, one of many such groups examines the gun and asks questions as members gather around the M1900 6-inch rifle and take a short rest before the next gun drill. In this photo, the muzzle markings are distinct and clear - Gun. No #23, manufactured in 1903 at Watervliet Arsenal and the tube weighs 19,868 pounds. The entire gun, cradle and carriage weigh over 47,000 pounds. The main markings are "6-in Gun No. 23 Ord Dept USA Mod 1900".



Another view of Gun #1 shows CPL Meiselman and PVT Schaffer in the distinctive early WWII blue denim uniforms, taking a well-earned short break. The long length of the 50 caliber gun tube is very apparent in this view.



Even as the team prepared to end the day, the public was still present on the Gun No. 1 platform. Below SGT King, T5 Komorowski, 2LT Cusano, 1LT Lutkenhouse, BG DiGiovanni, COL Antonucci and MAJ Kopin prepare to head up the stairs for the final group photo.



PVT Schaffer and COL Antonucci have just traversed the gun in preparation for the photograph.



In this photo we see the membership and guests preparing for our final group photo of the weekend, which is always a bittersweet moment.



Preparation equals donning cartridge belts and haversacks, securing individual weapons and gas masks, and checking each other to ensure historic accuracy. Gun implements and the donation can are prominently shown in this photo. The group photo proper is on page 1 of this article.



AGFA members are seen here, after the end of the day and the majority of the public has departed, securing the gun's muzzle with a waterproof cover. This is a key aspect of securing the Battery after an event, ensuring that the elements do not work their way inside the gun tube, causing rust and/or corrosion.



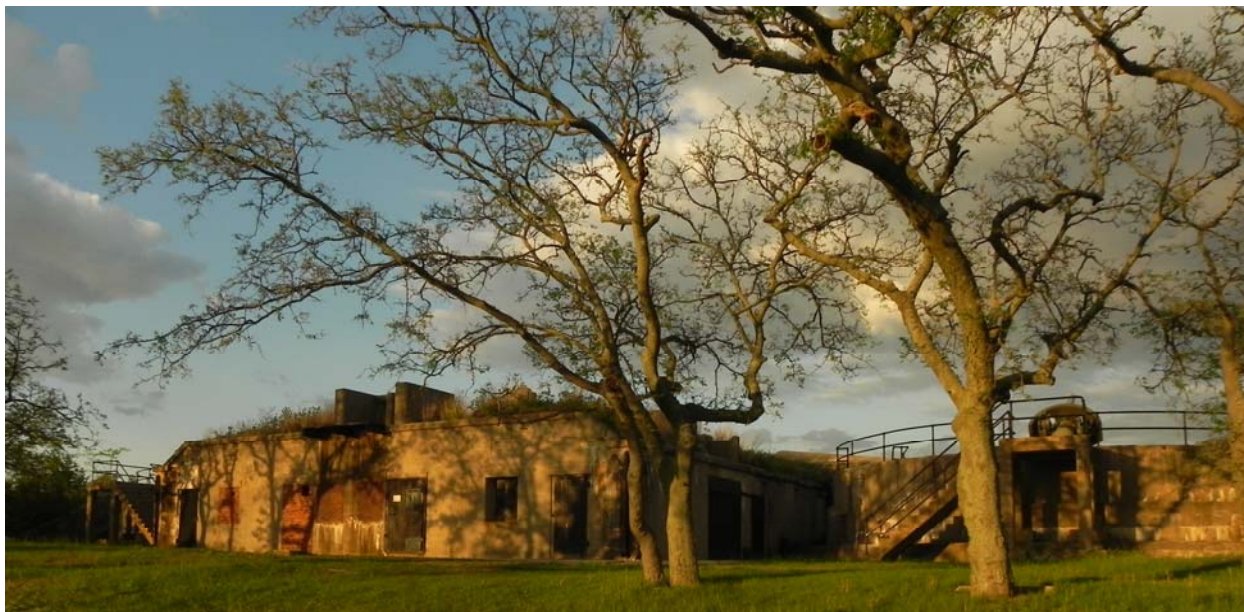
Coast Artillery batteries, as a result of their tactical locations, often offer beautiful and stunning views of the areas they defended. Seen here in the late afternoon sun is the view from atop Battery Gunnison/New Peck of the Atlantic Ocean, as well as the Sandy Hook and Ambrose shipping channels. New York City is visible on the horizon in the top left of the shot.



As securing the battery tasks near completion at the end of the day, our guests MAJ Kopin, COL Antonucci and BG DiGiovanni (AKA BG Phillip Gage) gather with LTC Welch in the magazine and talk in anticipation of the next event in October.



Another fun filled Fort Hancock living history event draws to a close. Buttoned up and secured, Battery Gunnison is seen below, lit by the late afternoon sun. We have come a long way in our restoration efforts, and we look forward to many more years of work and camaraderie to come.



Throughout the summer of 2014, AGFA members and US National Park Rangers will be offering guided tours of Battery Gunnison/ New Peck at times specified on the NPS website (<http://www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/index.htm>). For additional information call the Sandy Hook Unit, Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Landmark Visitor Center at (732) 872-5970.

For more information, visit the Army Ground Forces Association Website <http://armygroundforces.org>