

Coast Artillery Living History  
Fort Hancock, NJ

On 19-21 May 2017, the National Park Service (NPS) conducted the annual spring Coast Defense and Ocean Fun Day (sponsored by New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium - (<http://njseagrant.org/>) in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) and other historic and scientific organizations. 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 and is designated "The Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark".

AGFA concentrates its efforts at Battery Gunnison/New Peck, which from February to May 1943 was converted from a 'disappearing gun carriage' battery to a barbette carriage gun battery. The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Paul Casalese, Constantine Cherkashyn, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Chris Egan, Daniel Fortak, Francis Hayes, Doug Houck, Richard King, Anne Lutkenhouse, Eric Meiselman, Mike Murray, Kim Parr, Jerry Still, Paul Taylor, Shawn Welch and Bill Winslow. AGFA guests included Callum & Peter Bujdos, Matt Davenport, Jake Dillon, Phil Galvano, Joe Di Giovanni, Renee and Joel Gonzales, Chris Moore, and Steve Rossi.

The event had three major components: (1) the Harbor Defense Lantern Tour on Friday evening; (2) the six-mile Fort Hancock Historic Hike on Saturday afternoon and (3) Coastal Defense Day on Sunday.

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 activation of two 6" rapid fire M1900 guns at New Battery Peck (formerly Battery Gunnison). The guns were relocated to this site to provide a greater field of fire in the defense of the Ambrose Channel at the entrance to 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 Historic Hike and Lantern Tours focused on fortifications and other structures across Fort Hancock (Sandy Hook) in World War Two, as well as components of the Sandy Hook Proving Ground.

The photo below shows the majority of the participants on Friday, 19 May in front of the machine shop and Gun #1 of Battery Gunnison/New Peck. Notice the first major improvement since October 2016 - the new Ammunition Bridge for Gun #1 is in place awaiting a railing. The bridge for Gun #2 is also in place.



Members started to arrive on Thursday evening and beginning on Friday morning, we prepared for the day. Below, 2LT Still, LTC Welch and CPL Cusano begin by making sandwiches for lunch. Of course, CPL Cusano has to test the first sandwich!



Once we arrived at Battery Gunnison/New Peck, the medical team began setup. Below, 2LT Cusano demonstrates an aversion to misquotes which actually were present. Notice the lighting has changed. As part of the Decontamination chamber completion, the lighting was upgraded by rerouting and adding a light in the corner above the medical storage cabinet.



Installing the communications wiring is key to interpretation for Gun #1 platform. Below our guests Matt Davenport and Jake Dillon begin the process of installing the communications wiring.



At the same time, CPL Cusano and SGT Egan begin installing the platform lights. 2LT Still has just completed installing a EE-91 telephone on the board to his left. Notice the new ammunition bridge to the left of CPL Cusano - a major project of the National Park Service.



During setup of the medical displays, 2LT Kim Parr arrives after a long two day drive and is greeted by 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano. 2LT Parr managed our mess operations - critical for execution of the weekend event!



As the medical displays go into place, the large leak in the ceiling had to be addressed. A temporary fix of plastic and "duct tape" came to the rescue and protected the valuable and difficult to replace 1930s and 1940s vintage medical equipment. The two-gallon bucket in the corner was to catch the water. The water was leaking so much that we actually emptied it at least once during the weekend.



One of the two most significant restorations we unveiled for the public was the completion of the Chemical Warfare Decontamination Air Lock. This project had only seen the standpipe partially completed over the past two years. Beginning in January, we moved to complete this portion of the Chemical Warfare project. Below are the complete assembly of switches, activation chains, treadle and standpipe as finally completed. Now when someone steps on the treadle, the blower starts and Red light illuminates (right picture) to signify the air lock is occupied. This is the only restored air lock operating in the USA.



In the room next to the decontamination air lock is the newly installed blower motor and electrical assemblies to operate the motor. The blower is from the immediate pre-WWII period, the motor from the 1920s and the electrical fixtures are dated 1939. The system works as originally designed in 1942 and installed in 1943. The next step is to install the blower and pipes for the Plotting Room.



The two photos below show the Decontamination Air Lock in January 2017. The project lead, PFC Ciemniecki, contemplates measurements. Notice the blower and electrical assemblies are completely absent and the blower pipe is minimal with no pulleys, switches, etc. to make it function. In less than four months the team completed the Decontamination Air Lock (blower pipe, switches, pulleys, and treadle) and the blower, motor, and electrical connections for the "air lock occupied" red light. Many members were key to this work - PFC Ciemniecki, SSG Weaver, T-5 King, T-5 Komorowski, SGT Meiselman, PVT Tunison - all had major roles in this project.



In the photo below we see the other major change to Battery Gunnison/New Peck - the installation of the Ammunition Bridge for Gun #1. This was a substantial project planned jointly by NPS and AGFA and executed by NPS. The final design is pending for the railing. Once that is completed, we will begin to use the bridges in our loading drills and in the restoration of the Gun #1 hoist and receiving table.



Another restoration improvement is the location, restoration and installation of six vintage 1915-1930's era wall lights. In the photo below two "ceiling" lights were replaced by two wall lights. The wall lights greatly improve the existing light situation.



The original installation of "ceiling lights" horizontally is apparent below. This picture was taken in March 2017 before the switch to "wall lights".



Below is the same view showing the "ceiling lights" replaced by three "wall lights". The improvement in illumination made by the wall lights to the interior spaces is apparent in this view. Finding and being able to restore these wall light fixtures greatly increases the accuracy of the restoration work.



In the late afternoon, CPL Cusano spot paints the gun. The paint we use is a very high strength enamel made by Gillespie Coatings. It holds up well to the sun and salt air.



In the photo below, the new powder bag tray (donated by CDSG member Roger Davis) is shown with the drill powder bag. The Gun Commander's EE-91 telephone is shown installed in its phone box. Notice also the closely trimmed vegetation - action taken by both NPS and AGFA resulted in a landscape that is very close to that of the World War II period.



In the photo below, 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano enjoy the dinner prepared by 2LT Parr. This was critical for preparation for the lantern tour. The meal was prepared in the barracks and brought out in 1942 dated "marmites" which are on top of the large wood storage box in the background.



2LT Parr heated the meal on a 1940 Coleman 500 Speedmaster stove using a 1944 cooking pot. She is clearly happy with the outcome - and so were the Cosmoliners!



The meal was served to hungry Cosmoliners. Taking a break from setup, SGT Egan, T5 King and 1LT Taylor enjoy a fine meal of hearty stew and rye bread.



After dinner, members began preparations for the Harbor Defense Lantern Tour.



We departed Battery Gunnison/New Peck at about 1800 hours and walked to the Post Guardhouse (museum). Below the tour team walks within the Harbor Defense Command Post (HDCP - mortar battery) inner wall.



As the public arrived, members adjusted their uniforms and equipment in preparation for the tour.



Below the tour group moves towards a group of 10-inch and 12-inch seacoast artillery projectiles that are piled near to the original fire house.



The four 10-inch projectiles and five 12-inch projectiles are shown below. These are early (pre-1915) projectiles. They can be dated by the narrowness of their rotating bands. The 12-inch projectiles all weigh about 1,000 pounds. The projectile with the “yellow star” at its tip in the photo below was recently found by the National Park Service on the beach. The Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) group at Earle Naval Weapons Station checked the shell and determined it was not explosively loaded. This shell is different (longer) than the other four 12-inch shells.



Below RCT Bujdos stands at the entrance to the Harbor Defense Command Post - the HDCP (mortar battery) as our visitors enter the battery emplacement area.



Inside the "mortar pit" one can see the entrance door in the back. The pipe that is venting upwards is actually an air intake for the Chemical Decontamination Station and air purification system.



After visiting the HDCP, the tour group moved down Hudson Road and passed Battery Granger (two 10-inch disappearing guns).



Upon arrival at Battery Potter (the Harbor Entrance Control Post - HECP), the tour stopped to observe the ruins of "Tower G".



In the photo below, LTC Welch stands on the remains of Tower G and explains the use of Fire Control towers at Fort Hancock.



After departing the HECP, the tour group moved down the multi-use path (MUP) and passed Officer's Duplex housing (NPS Housing) built in 1939 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a "New Deal" agency of the Roosevelt Administration. It was designed to help America recover from the Great Depression.



The next stop on the tour was the Sandy Hook Proving Ground "Gun Line". At this location, from about 1890 to 1919, the Army tested coast artillery cannons and other artillery. Most all of the weapons that the US Army used in the Spanish-American War and World War I were tested and "proved" at this location.



The next stop after the Proving Ground gun line was the Test Block for the turrets designed by the Army for mounting on Fort Drum - the Concrete Battleship in Manila Bay (<http://www.concretebattleship.org/>). These two turrets, each mounting two 14-inch M1909 seacoast rifles, were the most formidable fortification weapons installed in the Harbor Defenses of Manila and Subic Bay. Fort Drum was constructed from 1916 to 1919 and served valiantly in the Siege of the Philippines at the outbreak of World War II. AGFA cleared the site in 2016 and with the Coast Defense Study Group and the National Park Service, designed and installed the two wayside signs shown in the picture below.



The tour then proceeded down Atlantic Drive to the corner of Gunnison Road preparing to enter Battery Gunnison.



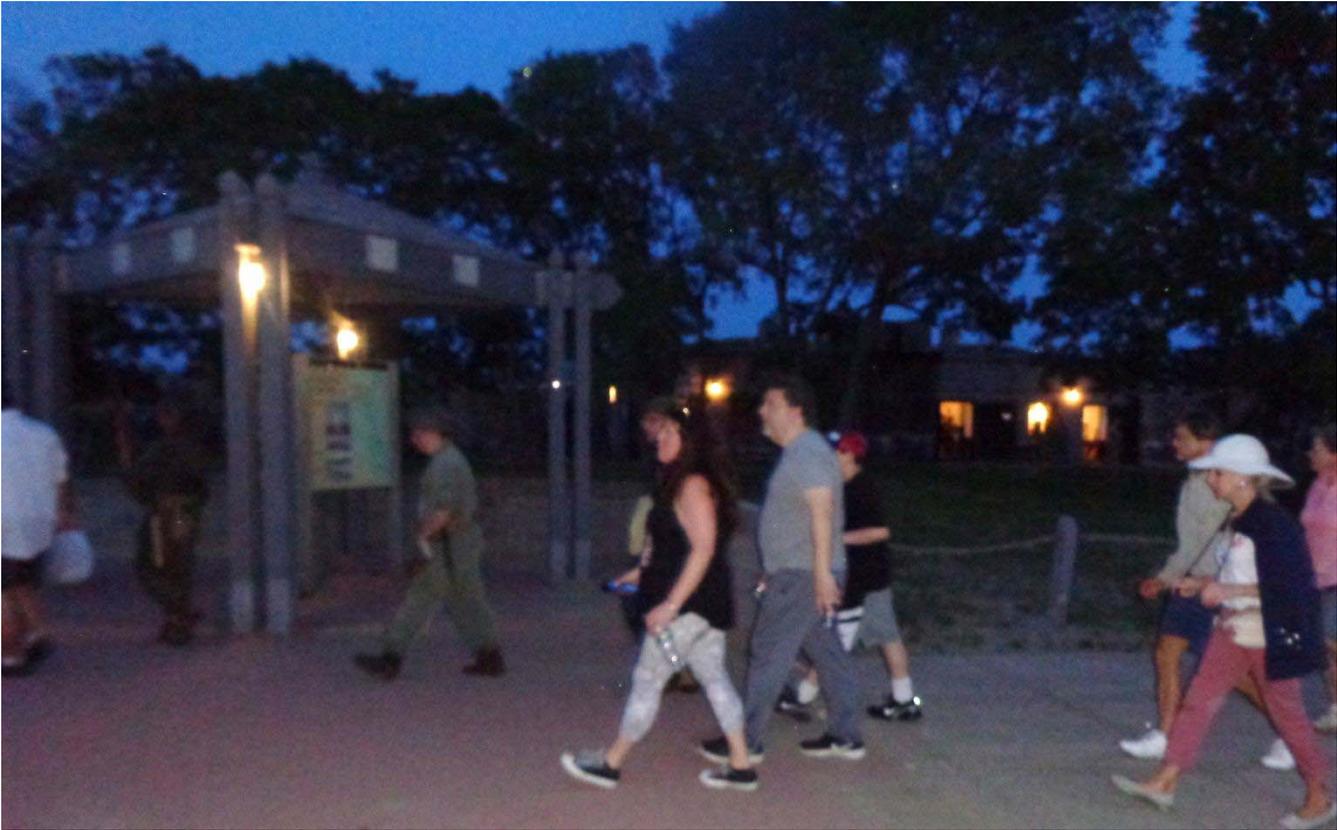
In the photo below, AGFA members prepare the public for the recreation of a “challenge” to a sentry at Battery Gunnison/New Peck.



Below 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Murray prepares to “Challenge” the tour group. Once the group successfully answers the challenge, the group will be allowed to enter the Battery Gunnison/New Peck area.



In the photo below the visitors have been briefed and are preparing to enter the Battery Gunnison area. Notice the rooms and exterior of the gun battery are illuminated.



Once arriving at Battery Gunnison/New Peck, 1LT Taylor, 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano provide the entrance briefing for our visitors.



By the time we arrived at Battery Gunnison/New Peck, we had approximately 60 visitors. The size of the group is apparent below.



T-5 King explains the equipment in the machine shop to visitors. Another change is evident in this picture - a "new" vintage wall light that replaces a ceiling light sticking out off the wall. This is a major improvement regarding lighting.



The newly functioning decontamination air lock is interpreted by RCT Budjos. Below he is adjusting his gas mask (left) and pointing out features of the installation to visitors in the left. The visitor line was long to experience the newly functioning system.



The plotting room was constantly busy. Below 1LT Winslow explains the functioning of the plotting board to visitors.



Below is LT(jg) Casalese and his US Coast Guard display. This display provides a detailed description of how the USCG operates the entrance to the Harbor in conjunction with the Army and Navy.



A very new addition to the interpretation is a fully functioning EE-86A Time Interval Apparatus from 1943 owned by CPT Prostack. All through the evening this device operated and powered the time interval bell system. The system is powered by 30 volt DC current and did a fantastic job of "ringing the bell". Its operation fascinated our visitors.



Below two of our visitors examine the EE-86A time interval apparatus - many questions were asked as they were fascinated by its operation. Each disc on the apparatus represents a time setting from 1 second to 60 seconds. The setting used by the battery personnel is 15 seconds. The box to the left of the apparatus (with the fan on top) is a solid state time interval apparatus that we made about 14 years ago. We use it most of the time. The original EE-86A is stored off site except during event weekends.



Next to the plotting room, the medical station in the chemical warfare mechanical room was very busy. 2LT Cusano is inside explaining the materials as 1LT Lutkenhouse looks in from the doorway.



Below visitors are illuminated by one of the two restored platform lights on the Gun #1 platform. The new ammunition bridge is visible on the left of the picture.



Below 2LT Still prepares visitors for the upcoming loading drill. The two operable platform lights are seen in the background. These were made in the 1910 time period and were restored by AGFA to working condition using original fixtures.



Below SGT Egan and RCT Davenport prepare for a gun drill. Notice the carriage lighting for the on-carriage fire control systems. The light on the left is on the range drum. The light on the right is on the M1904 telescopic sight assembly.



2LT Still observes as RCT Davenport rams the drill shell into the 6-inch M1900 rifle with assistance from our visitors.



The photo below shows the azimuth indicator and its on-carriage lighting system. The indicator was fabricated in aluminum by AGFA member T-5 Komorowski. The cable crossing the concrete and going up into the gun proper is for the head/chest set for the gun pointer's telephone.



Below RCT Dillion uses the gun pointer's head/chest set to speak to a visitor on the deflection board operator's telephone on the other side of the gun platform.



The gun platform is illuminated below. The side of the new Ammunition Bridge is highlighted to the left in the picture.



Below is a view of the projectiles in the magazine (left) and SGT Meiselman provides information to visitors on the powder storage (right).



As the evening came to an end, LTC Welch and Pete McCarthy, NPS Sandy Hook Unit Manager, discuss future projects. 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt Murray prepares to join the conversation while carrying an M1903 Springfield Rifle - the standard individual weapon for soldiers stationed at Fort Hancock in 1943.



Saturday morning we slept in until about 0730. At about 0900 we had breakfast - the hot coffee was very welcome!!!



After breakfast the Historic Hike tour team began a review of the hike program and historic documents, refreshing ourselves about the locations we would be visiting and the key points we would make with the public.



During the prep for the hike team, the rest of our members packed the “light picnic” bags for our visitors.



We arrived at our start point, Battery Gunnison/New Peck at about 1115 and began preparations. Visitors began arriving at 1130 and we gathered around the entrance to the plotting room.



Our visitors were treated to a briefing by Honorary Member (SGT) Francis Hayes, a WWII Veteran of the Battle of the Bulge (captured by the German Army). Below he provides an overview of Fort Hancock as 2LT Cusano holds a board that he made showing various pictures of Fort Hancock in the 1930's and early 1940s. This was Francis's 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday.



Approximately 27 people signed up for the Hike. Below, we gathered in a circle and introduced ourselves.



About a mile into the hike we started on the South Dune Trail. About 100 yards down the trail is the foundation for the Generator Building for the first of the two disappearing searchlights. Below SGT Egan and LTC Welch discuss the features of the building with the hikers.



About 75 yards away from the building is the counterweight for the first disappearing search light. In 2016, AGFA cleared all the vegetation from around both the generator building foundation and this counterweight. Below LTC Welch highlights key features of the counterweight.



Another 100 yards or so down the trail and we discovered the second counterweight. The hike tour members look at the counterweight from the trail in the photograph below.



And below is the counterweight. AGFA removed the vegetation that hid this item in April of this year. Notice the counterweight is different than the previous counterweight. The two searchlights were made by different manufactures.



The tour exited the South Dune Trail onto the Fishing Beach area. This is about mile 3 of the hike.



Below LTC Welch describes the remaining 1937 TNT magazine for the minefield. The other magazine was destroyed by Hurricane Sandy in 2012.



There were also two “high speed camera” pill boxes for the Sandy Hook Proving Ground in the same general location. Both still exist, but, one is now on the beach headed out to sea. Below SGT Egan explains its use to capture the impact of projectiles against armor plate.



Another very interesting artifact we saw was the remains of one of the fire control towers in the surf. This foundation is about 200 yards north of the camera pillbox shown above.



As we left Fishing Beach, we had to cross both sides of Hartshorne Drive on our way to Battery Kingman and our picnic. To the left of the group is a fire control telephone cable hut.



We arrived at Emplacement #1 of Battery Kingman. This battery had two 12-inch M1895 rifles on M1917 long range carriages. Originally constructed in 1917, these guns were out in the open. In 1941-42 the emplacements were casemated for protection.



Inside the emplacement we had a “light picnic” of period candies, crackers and meat products. It is amazing how many foods from the WWII time period are actually still available today.



SSG Houck and CPL Cusano hand out the picnic bags and everyone has a bite to eat and time to chat about what they have seen.



The inside of the emplacement is quite extraordinary. One very neat aspect is the overhead ammunition service is still in place. These rails were used to move 12-inch projectiles, each weighing about 975 lbs, to the guns.



After we finished our picnic, we paused for a picture in front of the emplacement. The size of the guns, though long ago scrapped, is still apparent given the size of the emplacement.



Upon our departure from Battery Kingman, we re-crossed the roads. Below our “road guard” detail deploys as hikers cross the road onto the “multi-use path” (MUP).



The team then moved north on the multi-use path headed to Atlantic Drive. Below CPL Cusano chats with one of our hikers.



As we returned up Atlantic Drive, we passed the Generator Building for both Battery Gunnison/New Peck and the search light that was on a hill about 100 yards to the left of the building.



The generator building was constructed in 1904 and the gasoline generator mounted in the building in 1918 still exists - it is on loan to Fort MacArthur Military Museum in Los Angeles, California.



The visitors had a flood of questions for us, and there was constant discussion throughout the tour. Many of our participants had no idea that the history of Fort Hancock ran so deeply throughout all parts of the peninsula. Even after our tour, hikers still had questions, and SGT Egan continues to answer them below.



Several hikers took time to visit the inside of Battery Gunnison/New Peck. A special visitor, Mr. Justin Batt, is at the right. He is the curator of the Army's Harbor Defense Museum at Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn, NY.



Sunday morning dawned early and RCT Budjos, Peter Budjos and SGT Egan prepare to eat breakfast and make our lunch sandwiches.



The majority of the Sunday team is shown below, to include five of our guests. We owe great gratitude to our guests as they made this event a very positive experience for the public.



Below is a photo of our vehicle-owning guests setting up their displays.



Below is a good view of the vehicle display area on the Battery Parade.



Phil Galvano's 1943 ambulance was a big hit with our visitors.



Below Phil Galvano, 1LT Lutkenhouse and Renee Gonzales discuss the medical displays.



Below Steve Rossi (1944 Jeep), Joe Di Giovanni (.50 caliber air cooled Anti-Aircraft machinegun), Chris Moore (Plymouth Staff Car) and Phil Galvano (1943 Ambulance) get the chance to chat as we have a short break in public presence. These four gentlemen were invaluable assets and greatly improved the Public's experience.



Below BG Joe Di Giovanni (interpreting BG Philip Gage, the commander of the Harbor Defenses of New York in 1943) shows a young visitor how a .50 caliber machine gun works. This is very rare mount and the gun (uses oxy-acetylene to make firing noises) is all 1944 and earlier. Battery Gunnison/New Peck had two water cooled M2 .50 caliber machineguns for anti-aircraft defense in 1943.



RCT Budjos prepares for more visitors as a group walks across the front of the battery slope to Gun #1 emplacement. Notice how clear the front of the battery is of vegetation.



Tracking ships with the M1904 telescopic sight is always popular with our visitors. Below, RCT Budjos provides information and instruction to a visitor as they track a ship in the channel.



During a pause in the public visitation, RCT Budjos and CPL Cusano get some “ship tracking time” on the 6-inch M1900 rifle.



But the public quickly showed up and they were back to interpretation very quickly.



Throughout the day the medical display had steady visitation. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse shows young visitors various historic medical items.



Below 2LT Cusano and Renee Gonzalez get a pause in the flow of visitors. This was unusual as by 1500 hours the public descended upon the battery area and we were steadily busy until we closed at 1630 hours.



Joel Gonzalez provides information to visitors on the ammunition storage function within the magazine. Below he stands next to the 170 6-inch projectiles stored in the magazine. This stack weighs about seven tons.



We had a number of special visitors, to include members of the NPS Law Enforcement team at Fort Hancock. Joel Gonzalez and Law Enforcement Ranger Platenecky chat at the entrance to the magazine. These Rangers have been a very great help to AGFA as we continue our restoration work. Their insight is invaluable to us.



About half way through the day, LTC Welch and T-4 Rossi visited the NPS booth at Ocean Fun Days riding in T-4 Rossi's jeep. Below Fort Hancock 21<sup>st</sup> Century Federal Advisory Committee member Jim Krauss and Gateway Public Affairs Officer Daphne Yun prepare for the public.



T-4 Rossi's jeep was parked near the booth and garnered a lot of attention as can be seen below.



Below T-4 Rossi drives his jeep on a loop around the post.



The public spent a lot of time at the vehicle and machinegun display. Below T-5 King and T-4 Rossi chat and T-3 Moore discusses the vehicles with a visitor.



Unfortunately with 70-plus year-old equipment, the inevitable maintenance issues arise. Below T-4 Rossi and BG Di Giovanni examine T-4 Rossi's jeep for a potential issue.



The ambulance and entrance to the medical station are in the photograph below. 1LT Lutkenhouse and Renee Gonzales chat and enjoy the day.



The plotting room is always an area of interest for our visitors. Below 1LT Taylor explains its operation to our visitors.



1LT Taylor demonstrates setting the azimuth box on one of the station arms on the plotting board.



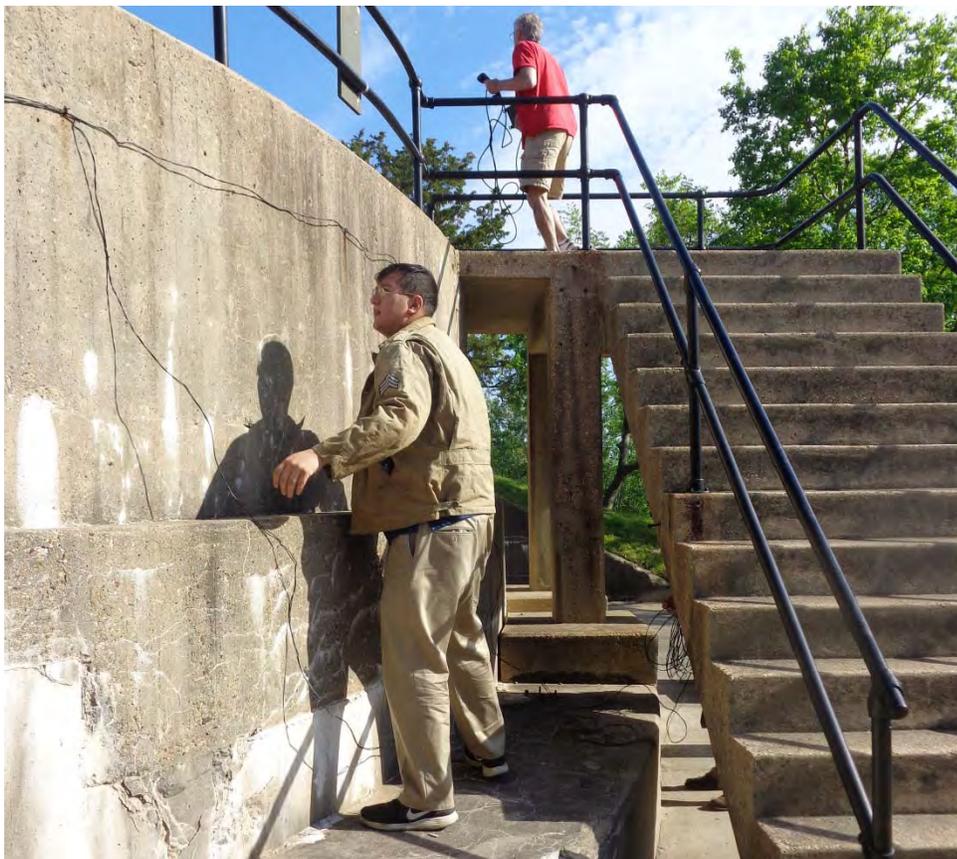
Throughout the day T-5 King demonstrated the lathe to our visitors. Below a father and son learn about the machines and their importance to the US during WWII.



The "Machine Line" in the tool room - from left to right is a shaper, lathe and drill press all from the late 1930s and early 1940s.



SGT Meiselman (who came directly from work) and Peter Budjos engage in removal of equipment and packing for storage. Without their help, the preparation for departure would have been very difficult.



T5 King stops on his way home to chat with 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse.



The summer of 2017 will be a busy one for AGFA. Please visit the NPS website (<http://www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/index.htm>) for additional scheduling information or call (732) 872-5970. AGFA will be hosting work days in July, so please be sure to visit the Army Ground Forces Association Website for our schedule at <http://armygroundforces.org>. or visit our "Battery John Gunnison-New Freemont Peck" Facebook page.