

## Coast Artillery Living History Fort Hancock, NJ

On 19-21 May 2023, the National Park Service (NPS) conducted the annual spring Coast Defense and Ocean Fun Day event (sponsored by New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium (<http://njseagrant.org/>) in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA). 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 District".

The educational objective was to provide interpretation of the Coast Artillery mission at Fort Hancock in the World War Two-era, focusing on May 1943.

The members of AGFA who participated over the three days were Tony Antonucci, Callum Bujdos, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Joel Gonzalez, Richard King, Henry and Mary Komorowski, Noah LeBlanc, Anne Lutkenhouse, Joe McCoy, Mike Murray, Paul Taylor, Wally Tunison, Steve Rossi, John Uhler, Shawn Welch and our guests Jacob Ansley and Gus Filippelli.

AGFA focused on the activation of two 6-inch M1900 barbette carriage guns at New Battery Peck (formerly Battery Gunnison). The battery structure was modified and the two M1900 guns were relocated during the first half of 1943.

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.

A major addition was the focus on Chemical Warfare operations in May 1943. This included both operating in a chemical environment and decontamination of an M1900 seacoast rifle after being attacked by a chemical agent. AGFA members prepared on Saturday by attending training on chemical warfare. On Sunday we executed gun drills in chemical protective equipment, and decontamination of the gun.

The photo below from Sunday 21 May shows that day's participants in front of the machine shop and magazine door areas.



From October 2022 through May 2023, AGFA continued to execute restoration and other projects to improve the interpretation of the Battery. To see an overview of major projects undertaken, there are reports available on the AGFA website at <http://armygroundforces.org/restoration.html>. Some of the projects we undertook since October 2022 include:

- A) Finished the fabrication and installation of the traversing gear systems for both M1900 6-inch seacoast rifles.
- B) Continued work on twelve platform lights from 9-gun battery to include restoring all ceramic light fixtures (16 total) that remained in place when we recovered the 12 remaining lights. We will use modern ceramic fixtures to replace the 8 that are missing.

Several other major projects are underway including (1) continued work on the azimuth indicator for Gun #2; (2) restoring 1915 Corps of Engineers Standard panel boxes for the Mortar Battery; (3) repair of sight cradle for Gun #2; (4) continuing restoration work for twelve platform lights for future use by the NPS; (5) continue work on wall light fixtures for mortar battery.

The photo below shows a new item for use during loading drills - a vintage "primer pouch". This photo shows the pouch and the eleven "primers" that were fabricated by CPT(CH) Uhler for use during gun drills.





The photo below show the inside the pouch with primers in place. The two large .50 caliber cartridge cases contain cleaning brushes for the primer vent hole in the obturator shaft. This keeps the leather of the pouch from being contaminated by cosmoline and oils.



On Friday we were visited by Evan Stackhouse (right) from Monmouth County Parks. He is the new historian/docent working at Battery Lewis (2 x 16-inch guns). With him are SSG King (left) and T-4 Tunison who also works with Monmouth County Parks at Battery Lewis.





One of the tasks we completed on Friday was painting the inside of the light reflectors of the four platform lights at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck. The shade on the left has been painted with a heavy enamel white paint. The reflector on the right shows the rust penetrating the white paint. While not the perfect solution, the enamel paint will slow the rusting considerably.



In the center of the photo below, CPL Cusano is painting the reflectors of one of the platform lights on Gun #1 platform.





On Friday we were visited by Law Enforcement Ranger Orlando Lovelace. He got a chance to operate the newly restored shell hoist for Gun #1.



Another Friday project was painting the Elevation Board Operator's station. Below CPL Cusano is applying OD paint with a roller.





Below SSG King inspects the primer paint job on seven of the platform light stanchions. These will soon be painted gloss black enamel.



Below CPL Cusano paints five of the seven platform light stanchions.





In mid-afternoon, prospective member Gus Filippelli arrived and is preparing to put his leggings on. 1LT Lutkenhouse is standing to his left after obtaining working materials for her tasks.



Below CPL Cusano continues painting the elevation board operator's platform. As the platform is treated wood, it requires painting about every three years for protection and longevity.





There are approximately 300 powder cans inside the powder magazine, and they make excellent storage locations. In the photo below, several of the cans are being used to store the 40 watt light bulbs that are used in the Battery's electrical system. The choice of 40 watt bulbs is to approximate the Army's standard 34 watt blub of the 1900-1945 time period.



The photo below shows the Friday team at the end of the day. While this team was "small", we achieved much outside preparation for the Sunday "Coast Defense Days" event.





The team stayed in Bldg #41, a WWII Wood post office converted into housing by the National Park Service in the 1990s. Here, 1LT Lutkenhouse, 2LT Gonzalez, 2LT Cusano, CPL Cusano and RCT Filippelli have Friday dinner.



Saturday morning breakfast in Bldg #41. Below, 2LT Cusano mans the toaster as CPL Cusano and RCT Ansley await the next round of toast.





Saturday turned out to be a very rainy day. In the photo below, PFC McCoy, PVT Antonucci and CPL Cusano are preparing for the day in the plotting room.



T-3 Komorowski arrived early on Saturday morning and is shown getting the machine shop ready for the day's work.





While the day was mostly rainy, we took advantage of the time to learn about Chemical Warfare materials in preparation for Coast Defense Days on Sunday. Below PVT LeBlanc explains the interior workings of a chemical protective mask's filter.



Below PVT LeBlanc shows a mask filter case that has been “sectioned” to show the interior components.





Below is another view of the Chemical Warfare training provided by PVT LeBlanc, CPL Bujdos and RCT Ansley. The instruction below is about the various chemical protective clothing issued to soldiers.



The photo below shows a permeable, and impermeable, protective clothing as well as various gas masks, a flame thrower and decontamination equipment.





Below in the left center is an inert flame thrower, and to the right are two decontamination sprayers and a decontamination solution mixing bucket and funnel.



Below shows two different gas mask filters that have been sectionalized to see how they are constructed and their basic components.





Below is a photo of the Chemical warfare items to include "simulated" chemical munitions such as a 155mm chemical shell (grey).



Throughout the day SSG King continued working on a new M1910A1 azimuth instrument base box. He developed his design from an original 1941 box and is in the process of replicating that box.





Another addition to our displays is a "Powder Thermometer" which is shown below inserted into a powder canister. AGFA owned a WWII Powder Thermometer, however, it disappeared sometime in 2021. A quick look on E-Bay turned up a 1950s vintage powder thermometer which is shown below.



Below is the Saturday team of 15 members in between rain squalls towards the end of the day.





Immediately after the photo, the team headed into the plotting room to conduct training on the fire control telephone systems. Below RCT Ansley and PVT LeBlanc are using the HS-17 head and chest sets for the station arm setters on the plotting board.



In the photos below, the left photo shows RCT Ansley, PVT LeBlanc and PVT Antonucci using HS-17 Head and Chest sets. The photo on the right shows RCT Filippelli is using the TS-9 handset of the EE-91 telephone that serves as the operator's telephone on the BD-95 switchboard.





Below PFC McCoy is preparing to operate the HS-17 headset on the Spotting Board telephone lines.



Below LTC Welch talks to each of the members using a TS-9 handset. To his left CPL Bujdos is talking on an HS-17 head and chest set for the Range Percentage Correction Board operator. The Range Percentage Correction Board operator sends corrected range to the Range Board Operator on each gun platform.





After about 30 minutes of telephone operation training, we then transitioned to training on fire control and the basic tasks to generate firing data for the M1900 6-inch guns. Below LTC Welch steps the team through several flow charts on how the data is generated.



The team attending the training, from left to right moving clock wise, includes LTC Welch, T3 Komorowski, 2LT Gonzalez, 1LT Taylor, PFC McCoy, RCT Filippelli, CPT(CH) Uhler, RCT Ansley, CPL Bujdos, CPL Cusano, PVT LeBlanc, PVT Antonucci.





At about 1830 we arrived back at Bldg #41. Below RCT Ansley is washing the coffee cups that we used during the day. 1LT Lutkenhouse just brought over a few more cups. In the background CPT(CH) Uhler and 1LT Taylor work on evening meal tasks.



Below Mary Komorowski (right), who prepared the Saturday dinner, is serving the main course to the team, from lower left clockwise 2LT Cusano, PFC McCoy, CPL Bujdos, PVT LeBlanc, and PVT Antonucci.





Below the team chows down on dinner - and CPL Cusano is preparing for another helping!



Below (left-right) CPL Bujdos, PVT LeBlanc, PVT Antonucci, PFC McCoy and RCT Filippelli have all cleaned their plates.





After dinner we conducted gas mask inspections (and repair) and basic training on operating the masks. From left to right are PVT LeBlanc, CPL Cusano, CPL Bujdos, RCT Filippelli, T3 Komorowski and PFC McCoy.



As part of the Gas Mask training, each member's gas mask was inspected and repairs were made as required. PVT LeBlanc and CPL Bujdos have extensive knowledge of gas mask maintenance and repair. Below PVT LeBlanc is applying anti-fog compound to CPL Cusano's mask.





Several members lack gas masks. Several masks were available for loan. Below PVT LeBlanc prepares a mask for loan to RCT Filippelli.



RCT Filippelli has just been issued his mask and begins the process to wear the mask carrier. However, he experiences some difficulty in making the closures work.





In the photo below on the left, CPL Bujdos helps RCT Filippelli with the proper wear of the gas mask carrier, and the photo on the right shows the mask carrier properly worn.



Gas Masks can bring out the sense of humor in folks as PFC McCoy experiences with CPL Cusano transforming into the "Mask Monster"...





...and the best answer to the "Mask Monster" is to be prepared at all times to become the "Mask Monster"...as RCT Ansley demonstrates below with the properly worn gas mask carrier...



Below CPL Cusano, 1LT Taylor and CPT(CH) Uhler enjoy fellowship after all the gas mask work is complete.





Sunday morning, we were up bright and early for breakfast. Below RCT Filippelli and CPL Cusano serve themselves breakfast.



Below CPL Cusano gets another egg as CPL Bujdos awaits the toast to finish and PVT LeBlanc continues moving to his next breakfast item.





One of the more difficult aspects of the uniform wear is the M1938 leggings. In the photo below, CPL Bujdos and CPL Cusano assist RCT Ansley in the proper method of putting on the leggings.



Below CPL Bujdos helps lace RCT Ansley's leggings.





After breakfast, RCT Filippelli, CPL Bujdos, PVT LeBlanc and RCT Ansley take a quick break outside before heading off to the Battery.



Site setup began in earnest around 0830. Below RCT Filippelli assists PVT LeBlanc and CPT(CH) Uhler in setting up the Chemical Weapons display tent.





Below 2LT Gonzalez and CPL Cusano set up the Battery Commander's station. 2LT Gonzalez is orienting the M1910A1 azimuth instrument.



Once the tent fly was up, the "Chemical Team" began to set up their displays.





Inside the machine shop, T-3 Komorowski was hard at work on projects on the lathe. The new LED work lights by CPT(CH) Uhler provide greatly improved lighting.



The medical aid station in the Chemical Warfare room has taken shape and is ready for the public.





2LT Cusano's partial collection of medical items on left side table, and 1LT Lutkenhouse's partial collection, on display in the aid station.



Preparing Gun #1 for the day's activities begins with removing all the heavy protective cosmoline from the breach block. This is being done by PFC McCoy, RCT Ansley and RCT Filippelli.





Below CPT(CH) Uhler's display takes shape below the Gun #1 platform.



Below is another view of CPT(CH) Uhler's display.





The displays in the Chemical warfare tent-fly take shape with a comprehensive mask exhibit.



Below is a more detailed view of the US military WWII mask exhibit. This exhibit also includes chemical alarms and protective materials.





Visible below is a Flame Thrower (which was considered a “chemical weapon”), a 100 lb. arial chemical bomb and a 155mm chemical shell.



Below (left to right) is a 4.2-inch chemical mortar shell, a 155mm chemical shell, a mustard gas 1-gallon chemical bomb, and a spray agent dispenser.





As setup proceeds, T-3 Komorowski has set up the machine shop for public viewing.



It's always a treat to see a few Park Ranger friends. In this case, two law enforcement Rangers stopped by to say "hi"! These are busy folks and we don't often get to see them - we got lucky!





One of the main displays inside the magazine on ammunition were the items below. The board on the left contains all artillery fuses developed at the Sandy Hook Proving Ground from about 1895 to 1919. Additional items include a Mk-V base detonating fuse, a 5-inch shell fragment, a 75mm shell with point detonating fuse, and two 3-inch armor piercing (AP) shells - one with wind shield and one without.



Below is another view of the shell magazine with the ammo displays and all the platform light stanchions.





Beginning at about 1200 hours, we conducted gun drills for the public. In the photo below the team is preparing for the first gun drill of the day.



Below we see a ship through the M1904 telescopic sight - just as the gun pointer above saw during the day.





Another view below of a loading drill as it starts. CPL Cusano is using the "slushing compound" to put out burning embers in the breach from the preceding shot.



As CPL Cusano moves away (left), PFC McCoy rams the shell into the breach as CPL Bujdos prepares to place the powder bag and tray into the breach.





Below PFC McCoy rams the powder bag into the breach and PVT Antonucci prepares to elevate the gun to firing angle.



Below LTC Welch inserts the primer as 1SG Murray looks on having already elevated the gun to firing elevation.





While the gun drills were proceeding, SSG King continues work on the M1910A1 instrument base box and chats with our visitors.



Below 1LT Taylor speaks with public visitors in the plotting room.

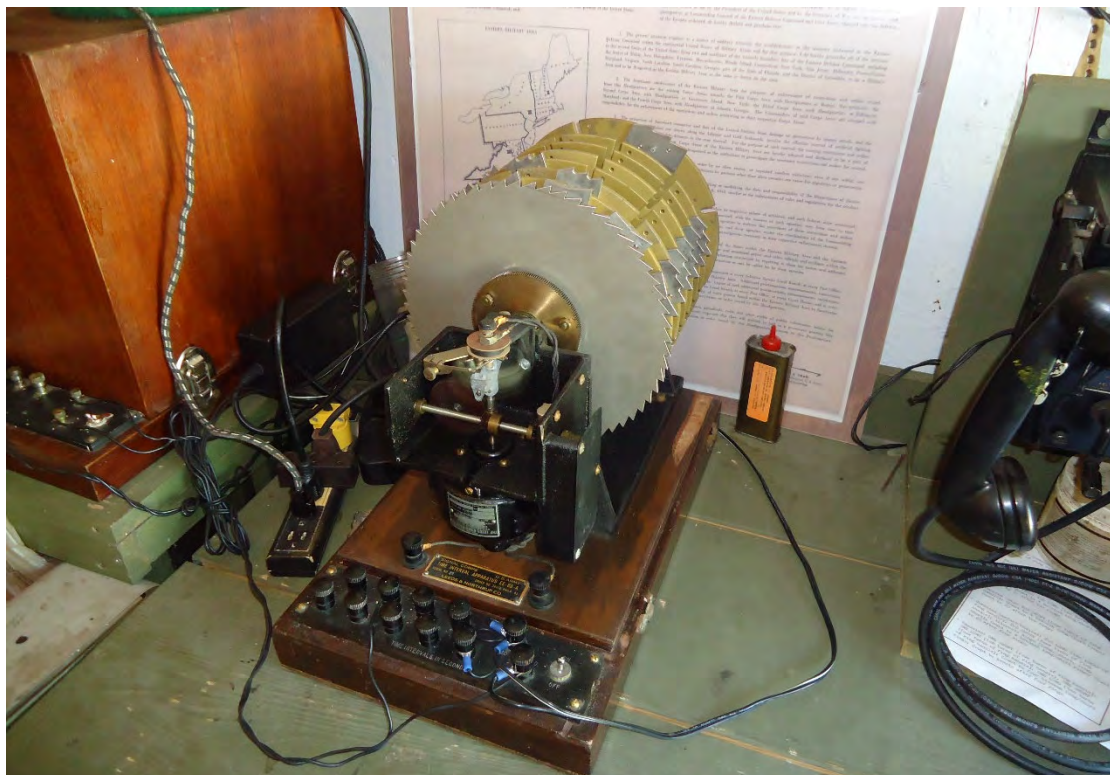




Below 1LT Taylor and 1<sup>st</sup> SGT Murray take a short break in the plotting room. On the ceiling is a wooden board with an MC-153 Time Interval bell and two cords hanging down for HS-17 head and chest sets.



There are many instruments in the plotting room. Below is an EE-86 Time Interval Apparatus manufactured in 1943. This apparatus is running the time interval system by ringing the bells every 15 seconds.





Below is an M1905 Deflection Board which is used to calculate the effect of shell drift, wind and angular travel of the target upon the "deflection" or offset of the telescopic sight on the axis of the gun bore to lead the target.



The "Wind Component Indicator" below resolves the effect of wind into two numbers - one affecting range the other affecting deflection or direction (travel) of the target.





The Battery Commander's station saw a lot of visitations during the day. Below 2LT Gonzalez explains the operations of the station to a visitor.



Below is another view of our visitors as they learn about the Battery Commander's Station and experience an M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument.





The photo below is taken from the Battery Commander's station and shows Gun #1 emplacement.



The same view only closer showing the gun, ammunition and handling equipment, the range chalk board and implements.





Looking down from the Battery Commander's station we see a gas mask training session being conducted at the Chemical Display area.



Below (left-right) 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt Murray, RCT Filippelli, RCT Ansley, PFC McCoy receive instruction from CPL Bujdos and PVT LeBlanc on how to properly put on the gas mask.





Training continues with CPL Bujdos demonstrating how to open the facepiece of the mask.



The students are now putting the mask on, clearing it and ensuring a seal.





Final fitting and checking the seal as CPL Cusano steps in to begin training (left).



Below the entire team is properly wearing their gas masks. This training lasted about 30 minutes as the team prepared for loading drills “in a chemical contaminated environment”.





The last major activity of the day was demonstrating the gun drill in gas masks. Below CPL Cusano uses the drill shell extractor to remove the drill shell.



In this photo, PFC McCoy uses he shell extractor rod to pull the shell onto the shell tray.





Below the gun crew prepares for another drill in gas masks.



Another view of the Gun Crew (left-right) 1<sup>st</sup> SGT Murray, PFC McCoy, CPL Cusano and LTC Welch.





Below the gun drill begins with CPL Cusano swabbing the breach, the shell detail prepared to place the tray into the breach recess and powder tray and bag detail standing by.



The two photos below show the team preparing for the next drill (left) as CPL Bujdos looks on.





Another view of a gun drill - in this case extraction of a drill shell.



In this view the powder bag has been rammed and the breach is being closed.





The view below shows the drill shell is being extracted.



Another view of the drill shell is now in the shell tray and being moved back to the "starting spot".



There were three drills conducted without gas mask, and three with gas masks. All three of the no-mask drills were conducted in under 15 seconds which is the standard for a well-trained crew in ideal conditions. The Army wrote that a drill in gas masks would take twice the time - but this team did it in 15 seconds three times.



The next step was to prepare to (1) identify the chemical used and (2) decontaminate the gun and equipment. Below the "Decontamination Team" prepares for its work. They are fitting full chemical protective hoods and Butyl Rubber gloves for maximum protection.



Below the team finishes putting on and sealing their protective gear.





Below the team collects their equipment - decontamination swabs and mixers.



The team moves up to the Gun Platform with all decontamination materials.





The materials on the platform below are the decontamination solution mixing bucket, swabs, decontamination solution sprayer and funnel for mixing the solutions.



The team begins preparing their materials..





The first step is identifying the chemical agent. Below CPL Bujdos uses an early WWII agent identification pump to “collect” a sample of the agent from the gun.



Once he secures the sample, he selects an agent identification vile from the identification kit.





Once the agent is identified, the process of mixing the correct decontamination solution begins. Below PVT LeBlanc uses an Army "Bull Horn" to speak to the public about what the team is preparing to do.



Once the solutions are mixed, the decontamination process begins.





Wiping down the gun tube and shield is the first step.



Spraying the solution on the carriage is another key step.





Decontamination continues on the gun shield and gun port on the shield.



The breach area requires special attention.





Once the decontamination is complete, a final “chemical agent detection” action is conducted. Below CPL Bujdos has prepared a vile for testing.



Once the vile is prepared, CPL Bujdos checks the vile and determines the agent is no longer present. The final confirmation of “no agent” was the final activity of the day of “Coast Defense Days”.





Starting at 1630 hours, the team began to break down the displays and materials. CPT(CH) Uhler's truck and others are in place to retrieve personal display items.



Below 2LT Gonzalez helps CPT(CH) Uhler load his truck while PVT LeBlanc and RCT Ansley prepare both chemical and chaplaincy items for loading.





Many items had to be secured and moved to their storage locations inside the Battery. Below PFC McCoy is removing telephone wire from the Gun Pointer and Elevation Board Operator's telephones. The wooden carry box above PFC McCoy holds the steel counter-weights for the guns replacing the weight of the breach covers.



By 1800 all historic items were secure with the last action to complete being applying cosmoline to the breach block of Gun #1 (completed below).





Below 1LT Lutkenhouse waves good bye to members departing as 1<sup>st</sup> SGT Murray heads to his own automobile.



With Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck fully secured and ready for member's departure, another "Coast Defense Days" weekend comes to an end. The Battery will be open during the summer during workdays that are scheduled with the National Park Service. AGFA's schedule can be reviewed at <http://armygroundforces.org/new-events.htm>.

For additional information regarding the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark District visit the NPS website <https://www.nps.gov/gate/index.htm> or call (732) 872-5970.