

Coast Artillery Living History Ft. Hancock, NJ

On 11-13 October 2019, 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 Ron and Yvonne Brodzinski, Callum Bujdos, Doug Ciemiecki, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Doug and Lynda Houck, Andrew House, Richard King, Henry Komorowski, Mary Komorowski, Tom Minton, Tom Morrison, Mike Murray, Paul Taylor, Wally Tunison, John Uhler, Gary Weaver, Deanna Weaver, Shawn Welch, and Bill Winslow.

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 Saturday, 12 October in front of Building #102 - the newly restored barracks at Fort Hancock. The last time AGFA was in Bldg #102 was May 2009 - over ten years ago!



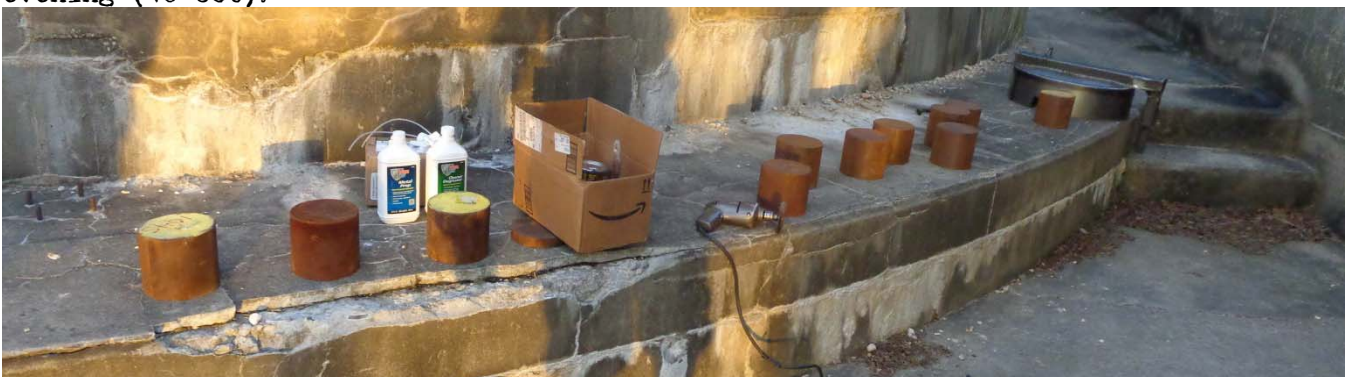
Between May and October 2019, AGFA continued to execute major restoration projects. The most significant projects advanced were as follows:

- A) Gun #1 Elevation Board Operator's Station.
- B) Gun #1 elevation counterweight installation.
- C) Gun #2 second platform light installation
- D) Gun #1 Breach Cover (replacing the old cut 55 gallon drum).

The photos below show the Elevation Board Operator's Station. The station consists of wooden stairs and platform, BE-63 telephone box which holds one EE-91 telephone, and the chalk board which spins to reveal one side at a time to the elevation setter on the gun. The wooden stairs were built of pressure treated wood in June and July 2019. They will "weather" through the winter and then be painted OD in the spring. PFC Morrison essentially built the wooden stairs and deck from an original Army drawing. Before the platform and stairs could be built, the existing rusted anchors had to be removed from the concrete. This took PFC Morrison and T-4 King about two months to figure out (May-June) but the successful approach was determined and the anchors were successfully removed. The BE-63 was purchased from AGFA member CPT Prostack and will be stored in the magazine when not in use for an event. The chalk board was fitted by members T-4 King and PFC Morrison in August 2019.



The photos below show the majority of the eighteen steel counterweights during rust removal and preparation for application of POR-15. This work was done Thursday evening (10 Oct).



In the photo below SSG Minton and PFC Budjos just completed applying the outer coating of POR-15 on the 18 steel counterweights on Thursday evening (10 Oct). These counterweights are each approximately 5.8 inches in diameter and 5 to 6 inches long. Total weight of all 18 is about 750 pounds. The breach cover pan was also coated with POR-15 that evening.



On Friday morning we completed the coating of POR-15 and cut a seating hole in two of the counterweights (one is shown below). This hole is to seat a 1-inch steel rod used when pushing out the counterweights from the recuperator spring cylinders.



The photo below shows LTC Welch drilling the seating hole in one of the counterweight slugs. This proved to be instructive work in the strength of steel and how to best drill into it with a large size steel cutting bit.



The photo below shows PFC Budjos and PFC House as they get ready to hand the second counterweight slug to SSG Minton.



SSG Minton prepares to lift the first slug (weighs about 48 pounds) into the left recuperator spring cylinder. Notice the setting hole in this slug. The opening to the cylinder is near the center of the cradle and only provides a work area for a cylinder no more than 10 inches long.



The second platform light (minus wiring) was installed on Friday 11 October. The light is shown below. It is mounted under the railing with an offset stanchion. This method was not used at Fort Hancock, however, the lack of flat concrete to secure the side mount, and the distance from the NPS installed railing necessitated this installation. Once the concrete is rehabilitated by the NPS, the light will be reverted back to its correct configuration off-set from the railing. The electric wiring was completed on 17 October.



The new breach cover (black) is shown below and replaces a 55 gallon drum that was fabricated as a breach cover in the 2005 timeframe. The requirement for the cover is to protect the very rare breach block and its associated small parts. The new cover was designed by T-4 Ciemniecki and T-4 King in the fall of 2018 and fabrication began in early 2019. Once fabrication was completed, the cover was coated with POR-15. The photo below shows the completed cover on Gun #1 on Sunday evening.



Additional projects whose work is ongoing will be addressed in the May 2020 Fort Hancock Days event article. The level of completion and visibility to the public will determine how much is reported in May 2020. Most of the projects require extensive documentation in support of NPS requirements. Current projects include:

A) Completion of Gun #1 counterweight fabrication and installation. The total weight required to balance the gun tube is approximately 1,200 pounds. The counterweight program is planned in three phases. Phase I was completed on Friday 11 October with the installation of 18 steel slugs for a total of 750 pounds. Phase II consists of a reproduction recoil yoke and supporting steel. This adds an additional 300 pounds. Phase III determines final weight and should be completed by May 2020.

B) Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck M1 Collective Protector (chemical warfare) valve restoration, reproduction filer fabrication and assembly installation. This is the last portion of the restoration of the M1 Collective Protector within the battery structure. The next phase will be the exterior air intake and that will be initiated once the NPS completes exterior concrete rehabilitation.

C) Restore the Gun #1 ammunition shell hoist.

D) Fabricate and install the M-3 plotting board gun arm and bracket.

E) Install restored metal door in left side recess of Battery Commander's Station

Annually, AGFA revises its restoration and preservation projects list in conjunction with the National Park Service at Fort Hancock.

In addition to project work, the team had to prepare for the Lantern Tour. One of the major actions is to sweep the area and remove all leaves and debris from the concrete. The detail below was "manning the brooms" to ensure success!



Below the Battery Commander's station, set up by CPL Cusano, includes the M1910A1 azimuth instrument, two EE-91 telephones, MC-153 time interval bell, and rifle rack.



Below 2LT Cusano is setting up her medical display in the Chemical warfare room.



Late in the afternoon once the battery is prepared for the lantern tour and evening mess has been served, SSG Minton issues M1903 Springfield Rifles (demilitarized) to PFC House, PFC Budjos and PFC Morrison.



Below 1LT Winslow (with M1928 Tommy Gun replica) looks on as final preparations are made and CPT(CH) Uhler downloads his displays into the magazine from his truck.



The photo below shows the AGFA members just before starting out on the Harbor Defense Lantern Tour.



Once the tour group departed the battery area, 1LT Winslow found a comfortable chair inside the plotting room to await the return of the tour group with public visitors.



At the start of the multi-use path near Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck, the tour group makes a quick check of equipment as they start out for the Fort Hancock Guardhouse (museum).



In the photo below, the team pauses for a brief moment on the multi-use path.



The photo below shows the team moving inside the protective wall of the mortar battery. The remains of a fire control tower are in the distance.



At about 1820 hours, the team arrived at the Fort Hancock guard house (museum). From left to right is TSG Weaver lighting lanterns, PFC Morrison (background) PVT House, SSG Minton (background) and PFC Budjos.



Below T-4 Ciemniecki chats with tour visitors prior to the start of the tour.



As the tour began, LTC Welch introduced the team and provided an outline on why the Harbor Defenses of New York were important to America.



Below SSG Minton and CPL Cusano discuss the PX and bowling alley building in the background with our tour visitors.



Below T-4 Ciemniecki stands behind the tour group in one of the pits of the Mortar Battery (Harbor Defense Command Post - the HDCP).



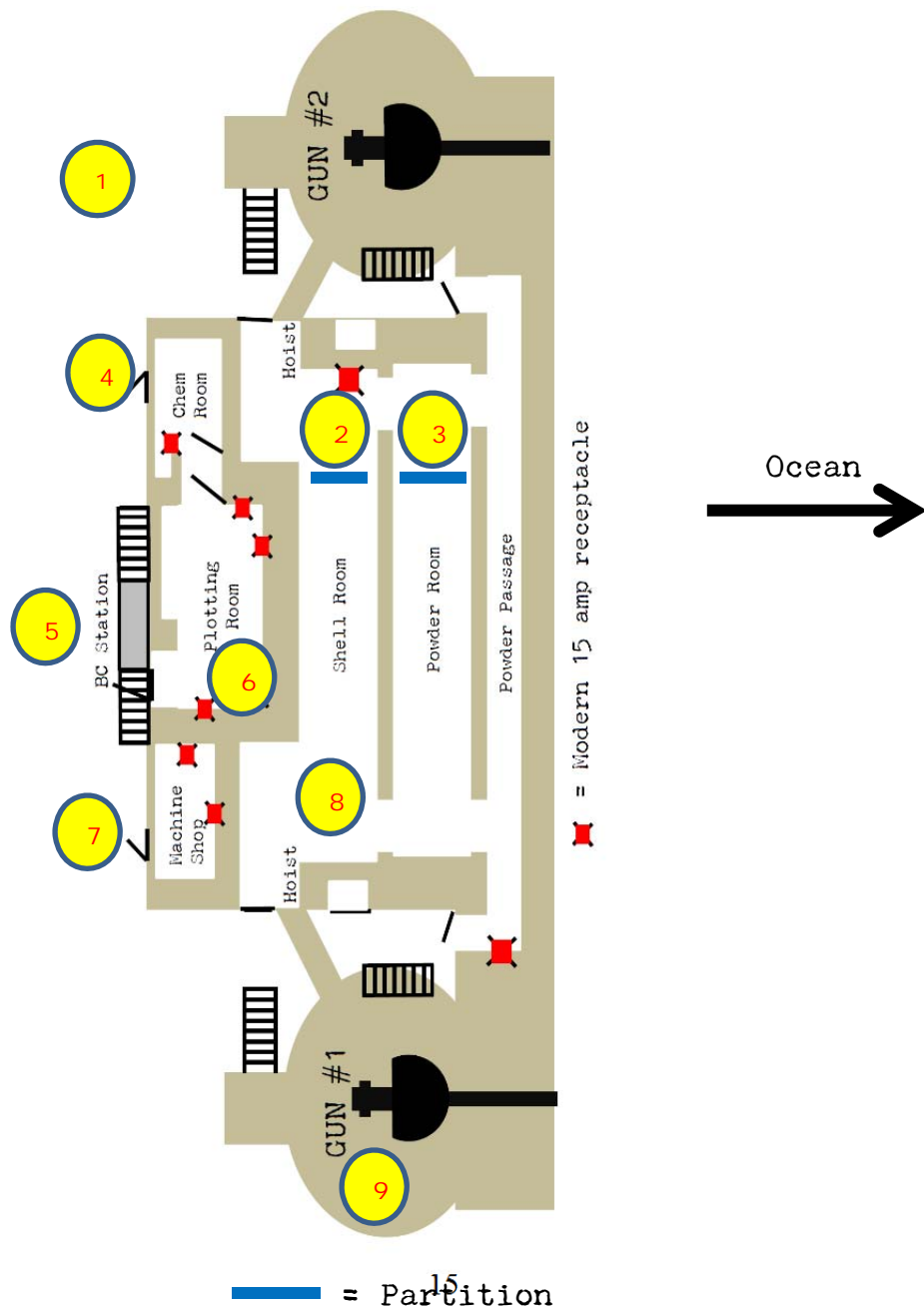
Below PFC Morrison listens as the discussions continue inside the mortar pit of the HDCP.



Once the tour arrived at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck, AGFA used 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 (Harbor Defense Submarine mine operations)
- 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 required AGFA to create eight groups of 6 to 7 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.



Once the groups were established, they moved to their respective starting stations. Below TSG Weaver discusses submarine mining with our visitors. To the right is an M2 mine case (2,000 lbs). There were about 400 such mines planted in the channel from 1941 to 1945.



In the lateral next to TSG Weaver was CPT(CH) Uhler with a comprehensive display on the military Chaplaincy.



Below is another view of CPT(CH) Uhler's station and as he discusses the chaplaincy, a young visitors eyes fixate upon the field organ to the left.



In the Chemical Warfare room, 2LT Cusano discusses medical equipment with our visitors.



As the public moved to their stations, 1LT Winslow stood ready to greet them in the plotting room.



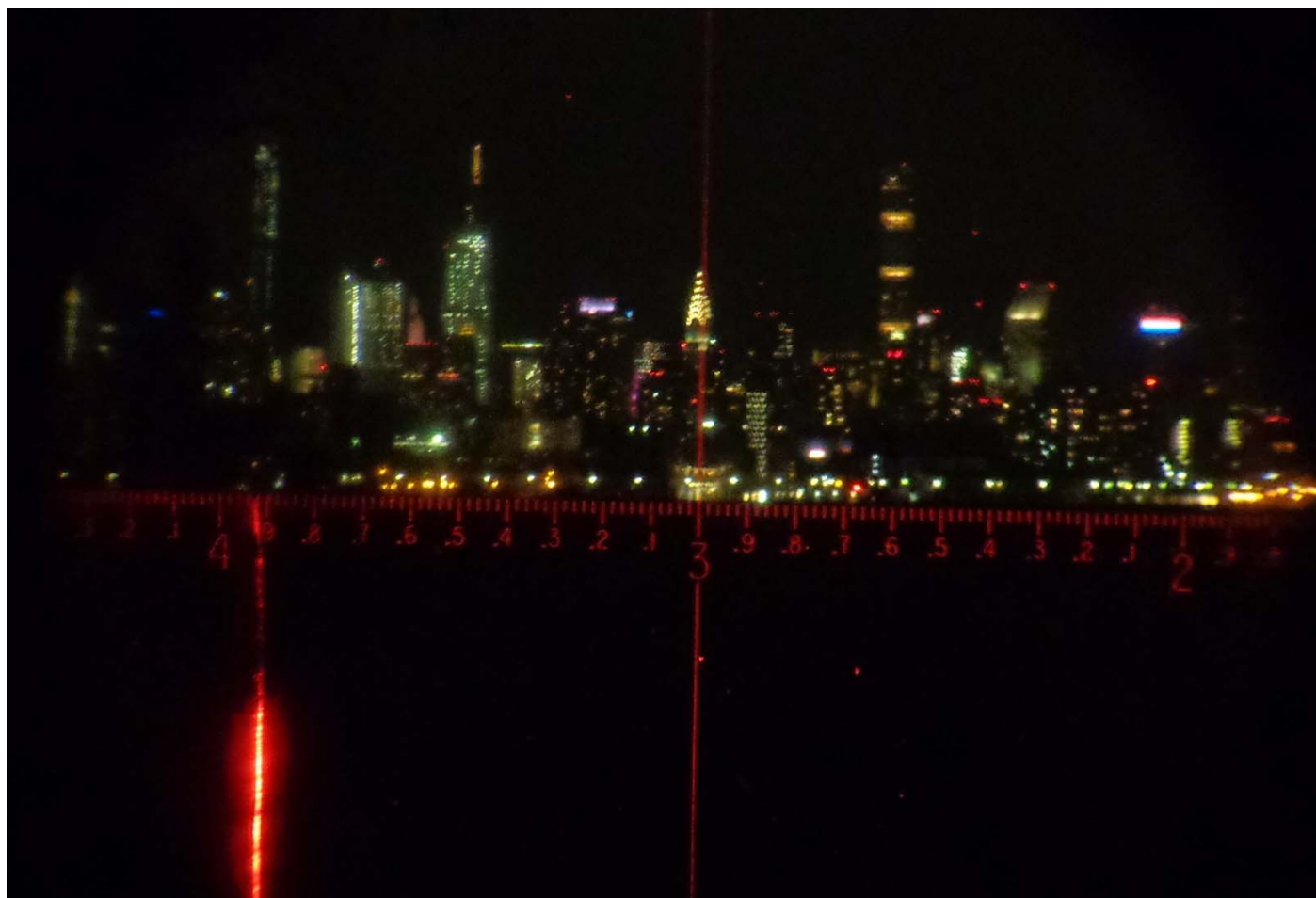
1LT Taylor and 1LT Winslow provided a comprehensive review of how the plotting room worked and the various items contained within it to ensure the guns could hit their assigned targets.



Up in the Battery Commander's station, our visitors got a chance to see New York City using an M1910A1 seacoast artillery azimuth instrument.



The view below is what our visitors saw through the scope. The reticle is shown in red and the "splash pointer" is seen to the left of the vision field.



Below T-3 Komorowski shows a WWII veteran a photo of a field machine shop. Then ensued a long discussion about the importance of machine shops to the war effort.



A view of the main machine shop table with (left to right) a Delta Drill Press Bench top Model 10-inch (early 1940s), an Atlas 10x36 inch Model 10F Lathe with motor (1941) and a Atlas Model MFB milling machine (1943).



Inside the magazine PFC Morrison provides information on the various types of artillery projectiles available in the Coast Artillery.



Below T-5 Tunison and PFC Morrison explain several of the ongoing projects to restore platform lights.



On the Gun Platform, from left to right PFC Budjos, SSG Minton and PFC House provide information on the M1900 6-inch seacoast rifle.



Below are some of the items used on the gun platform to include a rack to hold the soldier's M1903 Springfield rifles.



Below PFC Budjos walks around the breach of the gun during a discussion.



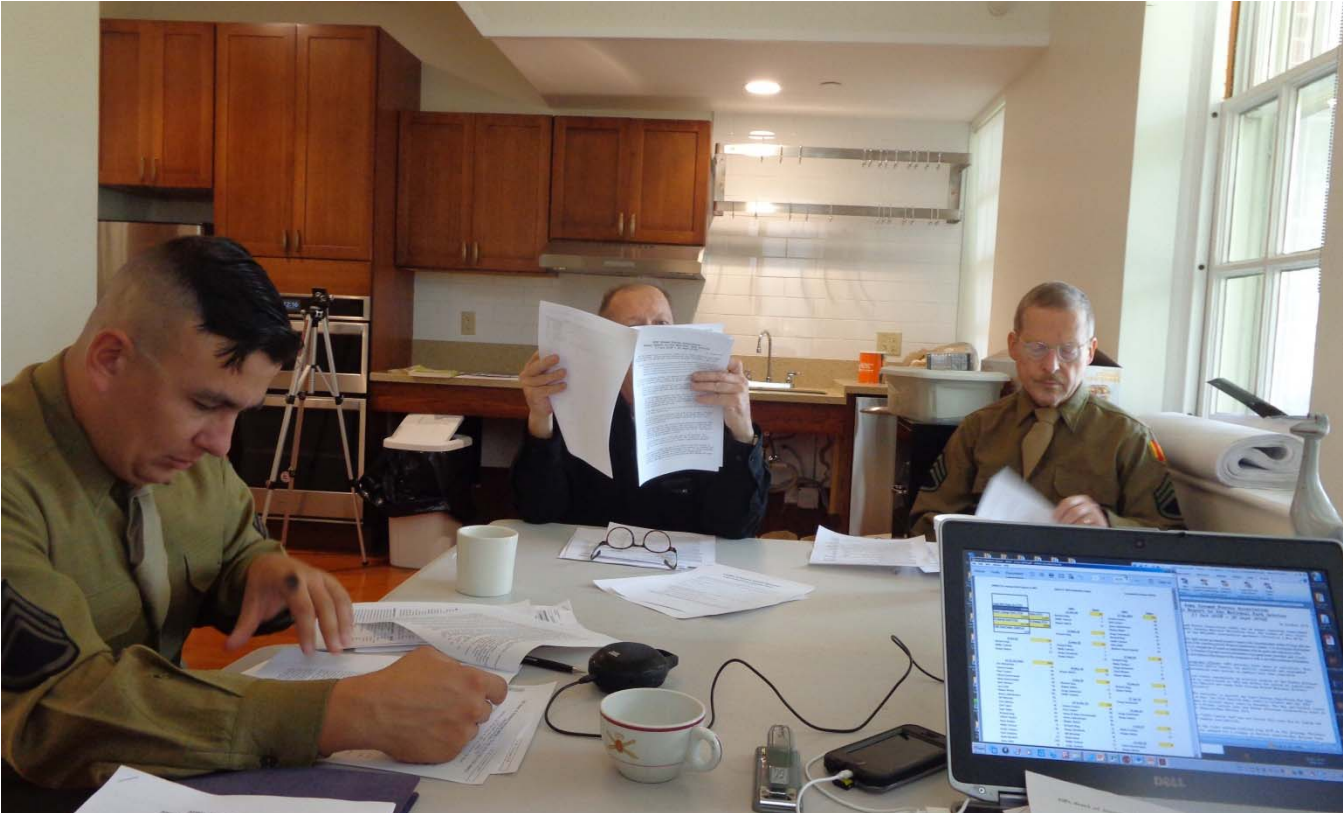
As the evening came to a close, 2LT Cusano prepares the mess equipment for return to Bldg #102. The chaplain's display is directly behind her.



The morning arrived sunny and bright. Below SSG Minton, Mrs. Weaver, TSG Weaver and LTC Welch prepare for breakfast.



Below the Board of Directors meets in one of the rooms inside Bldg #102. From left to right is SSG Minton, T-3 Brodzinski and SSG Houck.



AGFA's Annual Meeting was hosted in the mess hall of Bldg #102. Below a number of members read documents in preparation to vote on the restoration and preservation project list for the upcoming year.



Other members listen attentively during the discussion of projects.



After the meeting, the majority of AGFA members met with NPS Sandy Hook Unit manager Pete McCarthy to discuss various approaches to hazard management during our restoration and preservation work.



And during the various periods of "free time", we helped each other find uniforms and equipment. Below T-4 Ciemniecki assists PFC Morrison in finding OD wool uniforms that fit appropriately.



Our Annual Dinner was hosted in Bldg #102 and started with crudité at 1800 hours. Below SSG Houck, Mrs. Morrison, Pete McCarthy and Greg Norman (NPS Law Enforcement Chief) enjoy light snacks and great discussion before the meal.



Below PFC Budjos, T-4 Ciemniecki and CPT(Dr) Cusano fill their plates and enjoy great eats!



We had about 32 attendees at our dinner. Below, on the left is SSG & Mrs. Houck, CPT(CH) Ulher and Jen Flemming (NPS and her family), and at the table to the right is Jen Nersesian (Gateway Superintendent) and her family.



Below in the foreground are T-5 and Mrs. Tunison, SSG Minton and PFC House. Sitting on the opposite side of the table is Mrs. Morrison, PFC Morrison and PFC Budjos.



The annual dinner is a special time to recognize those who support our work. Below Pete McCarthy receives a certificate for his support as LTC Welch, SSG Houck and SSG Minton stand by.



Below LTC Welch presents a certificate to Greg Norman for his support of our work.



Below SSG Houck reads the certificate for Jen Flemming thanking her for all her hard work to provide housing for AGFA during work and event weekends.



LTC Welch presents a certificate to Jen Nersesian for all of her support, advice and counsel over the past year. Our success is due almost entirely to NPS support.



After the dinner, Mrs Weaver, TSG Weaver, T-3 and Mrs. Komorowski begin the "Kitchen Police" work so essential after a meal.



The evening was also a great time for socializing. Below T-3 Komorowski chats with PFC House as the evening winds down.



Sunday morning arrived bright and early and set up at the Battery was the priority. Below PFC Morrison and 1SG Murray assemble the Elevation Board Setter's station - in this case specifically the BE-63 box for the EE-91 telephone to the right.



The station setup is complete as 1SG Murray looks up and prepares for the next step in preparing the Battery for public visitors.



In less than 30 minutes, CPT(CH) Uhler had his displays set under the ammunition bridge at Gun #1.



On the gun platform all the loading implements and communications equipment was readied for the event.



CPL Cusano worked diligently to set up the Battery Commander's Station. As the Instrument operator, it was his duty to install the M1910A1 azimuth instrument, MC-153 Time Interval bell and two EE-91 telephones.



Below 1LT Taylor looks on as CPL Cusano continues his work. Notice his field equipment and M1903 Springfield Rifle are in the rack next to 1LT Taylor.



Below CPL Cusano is ready for visitors with everything working.



Below is another view of the Battery Commander's station, including on the right, a rifle rack containing CPL Cusano's M1903 Springfield rifle. Notice Gun #1 in the background with AGFA members working to prepare the gun platform for public visitors.



It took the team about 90 minutes to completely set up for the event. At noon we prepared for a photograph of the team.



Below is the team (minus two members who were busily engaged in a project).



As the public arrived, 2LT Cusano pointed out several of her display items in the Chemical Warfare room.



On the northern wall of the room she had a detailed display of equipment. A EE-91 telephone is in the lantern niche to the left and serves as her communications system to the other stations in the Battery.



PFC Budjos split his time between the gun platform and the Chemical Warfare room.



Below PFC Budjos shows a visitor how the M1 Collective Protector functioned by preparing them to enter the decontamination chamber on the way to the plotting room.



Below 1LT Taylor receives visitors in the plotting room.



Throughout the day 1LT Taylor discussed the operation of the room with the public.



During the day CPL Cusano provided detailed information and a visual experience for our visitors in the Battery Commander's station.



Below one of our visitors experiences the M1910A1 azimuth instrument.



In the photo below is what our visitor saw - the twin towers of the Maritime Bridge over in Brooklyn. The olive drab gun tube of Gun #2 is under the bridge.



Below LTC Welch and CPL Cusano provide detailed information on how the Battery Commander's station functioned to control the Battery's fire during wartime.



Inside the plotting room visitors got to experience the use of the Fire Control telephone system. Below LTC Welch assists two young visitors in using the HS-17 head and chest sets that were part of the EE-91 telephones, one of which is on the back wall.



LTC Welch discussed many aspects of the defenses with visitors.



Below T-3 Komorowski discusses the machine shop with a visitor.



While T-3 Komorowski shows our visitors how the shop works, T-4 King heads to the work tables to secure materials for one of his demonstration projects for our visitors.



In the photo below visitors spend time at the Chaplains exhibit.



The chaplain's field desk is especially intriguing to visitors.



CPT(CH) Uhler's exhibit had several large informational displays as can be seen below.



Several copies of Army artwork commemorating the heroic acts of Army Chaplains are shown in the display below.



A clearer view of the Chaplain's field desk as well as the access steps to the Elevation Board Operator's Station for Gun #1.



Behind the Gun #1 emplacement was CPT(CH) Uhler's jeep and field organ.



Inside the magazine PFC Morrison explained the various types of ammunition available and how it was stored.



Below PFC Morrison explains the shells in the stack below to one of our visitors.



On the gun platform we had several important visitors. Below 1SG Murray discusses aspects of the guns with a veteran of Okinawa in WWII.



Below 1SG Murray discusses several aspects of the gun platform with visitors.



TSG Weaver is prepared to greet visitors at the Elevation Board Setter's Platform station.



Below left 1SG Murray describes the job of the gun pointer and in the photo on the right 1SG Murray puts on the HS-33 head and chest set to demonstrate telephone communications in the Coast Artillery.



The photo below provides an expansive view of Gun #1 as seen from the top of the Battery central structure.



Below LTC Welch and PFC Budjos prepare to elevate the gun tube.



The southern side of the Battery to include Gun #1 emplacement are shown below.



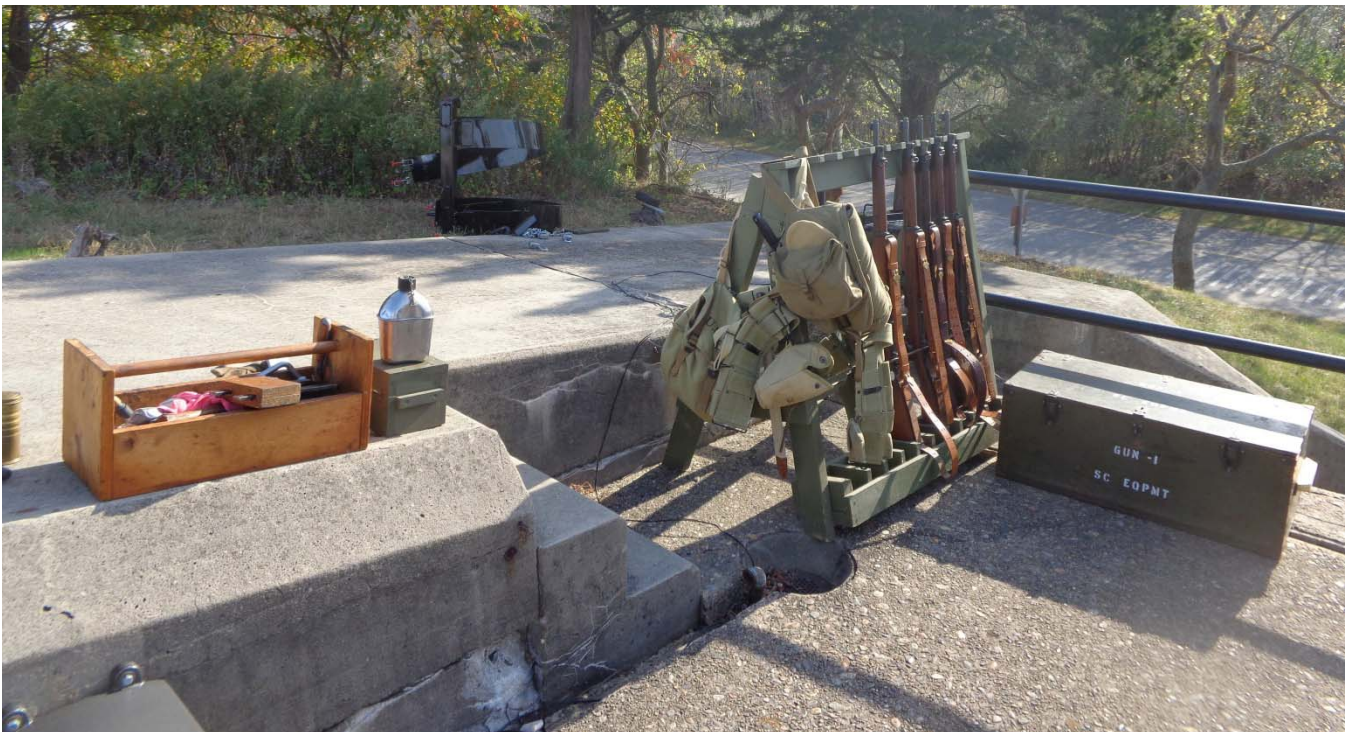
Looking down from Gun #1 emplacement to the entrance to the magazine, the Chaplaincy exhibit and on the bridge is SSG Minton discussing ammunition service with our visitors.



Below PFC Budjos prepares to open the breach block as visitors watch.



The photo below shows much of the soldier's personal equipment to include cartridge belts, haversacks and their M1903 Springfield Rifles secured in the rifle rack. Gun tools are to the left and the footlocker holds the telephones and other Signal Corps equipment when not in use.



As we prepare to close down for the day, T-4 King and T-4 Ciemniecki prepare the new Breach Cover to be re-installed on Gun #1.



After the fitting of the breach cover, LTC Welch prepares to elevate the gun tube.



Once the tube is elevated, PFC Budjos secures the sight cradle and T-3 Ciemniecki and 1SG Murray prepare to secure the gun platform and all equipment.



Below the team has secured the M1900 6-inch gun and is removing the last of the gun equipment for storage inside the magazine.



Below PFC Budjos carries the rifle rack, PFC Morrison the tool box and 1SG Murray one of the rifles to their storage locations.



After the Battery closes to the public, 2LT Cusano, 1SG Murray and SSG Minton empty the donation containers for the weekend and prepare for the required accounting of donations.



As the sun sets and the weekend comes to an end, the exterior lights turn on and CPL Cusano steps out of the plotting room with a cup of coffee. We are preparing to close Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck for the weekend and are reflecting upon a wonderful weekend. We had approximately 70 visitors on Friday night's lantern tour and about 400 visitors on the Sunday Fort Hancock Days event.



Throughout the rest of the fall 2019 and the winter of 2020, AGFA will be working at the Battery on various projects.

For additional information, call the National Park's Visitor Center at (732) 872-5970 or visit the NPS website to review the Park's program guides to see the schedule event at Fort Hancock <https://www.nps.gov/gate/playourvisit/index.htm>. One can also 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/>