

Coast Artillery Living History Ft. Hancock, NJ

On 7-9 October 2022, the National Park Service (NPS), in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) 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, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Joel Gonzalez, Richard Hill, Richard King, Henry and Mary Komorowski, Anne Lutkenhouse, Joe McCoy, Tom Morrison, Mike Murray, Paul Taylor, Wally Tunison, John Uhler, Shawn Welch and our guests Bryce Kleeman and Noah LeBlanc.

The educational focus was interpreting the Coast Artillery mission at Fort Hancock in the World War II-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 Battery Peck played as Advance HECP #1's Examination Battery. Key elements in our interpretation on Sunday were the 13 separate times that the battery fired upon ships entering the harbor which had failed to follow the instructions of the HECP, chemical warfare and decontamination, ammunition service in the magazine and loading drills on Gun #1.

The photo below shows the majority of the participants on Sunday, 9 October in front of Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck. At the top of the stairs is the Battery Commander's station with its M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument in place on the concrete pedestal, ready to track ships.



Work on restoration projects continued from May 2022. There are reports on past projects available on the AGFA website at in PDF format at <http://armygroundforces.org/restoration.html>. Work that continued through early October included:

- A) Continued work on the traversing systems for Gun #1 and Gun #2. The system for Gun #1 was essentially complete for the event weekend. The last work to be done will be fitting a new traversing wheel to the handwheel shaft. This will replace a "homemade" handwheel with a cast iron handwheel that closely resembles the original equipment. Gun #2 requires additional fitting and adjustment of the gears and shafts, as well as a new handwheel to be fitted to the handwheel shaft.
- B) Continued work on platform light restoration (three lights done, six remaining in various degrees of completion).
- C) Drilling fittings and mounting holes on bronze wall light castings for mortar battery electrical system restoration.
- D) Applied cold asphaltic sealant to the chimneys and vents on top of the Battery structure. This has greatly reduced water intrusion into the Battery and improved the outward appearance of the Battery more in line with the 1940s.

The Friday of the event weekend we focused on preparing the Battery and painting exterior metal. The most significant projects were painting of the Battery Commander's stairs and steel railings on the gun platforms. Below CPL Cusano and RCT Kleeman paint the railing on Gun #1.



In the photo below PVT Hill is painting the underside of the first few stair treads. This is important to prevent rusting of the metal connections.



In the photo below CPL Cusano is using a roller to paint the rails on the Gun #1 ammunition bridge.



Below, T-4 King is drilling the mounting holes into a Wall Light casting using a vintage floor mounted drill press that was originally purchased by the Army in 1951 for Fort Hancock. More on this later in the article.



Part of the preparation to paint the final areas on the Battery Commander's station stairs is removing the sand that accumulates on the treads. CPL Cusano and RCT Kleeman sweep the stairs as 1LT Lutkenhouse speaks with T-4 King who is inside the machine shop.



As Friday evening came to a close, the Queen Mary 2 passed by Fort Hancock.



And the ship passed by just in time as we had set up an M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument as a training event for our team. Below CPL Cusano is observing the QM2.



Below is CPL Cusano's view of the QM2.



As dusk approaches, the moon is apparent just above the bill of RCT Kleeman's hat. CPL Cusano is observing other ships in the channel.



As the sun continues to set, below is a view of the QM2 as it heads out Ambrose Channel towards the open sea.



As the sun set, we had great views of NYC. Below the instrument is aligned on the Chrysler Building. To the right is the Jump Tower at Coney Island - notice it is brightly lit as part of its nightly light show. The reticle inside the sight is also light - notice the red scale and bright red boarder inside the telescope.



Saturday morning came early and at the Battery we were greeted by the statuesque PVT Hill.



Work on various projects started immediately. Below 2LT Gonzalez is sealing the area where the air pipe passes from the chemical warfare room into the plotting room. The blue tape is to prevent the black caulk from adhering to the white wall.



A closeup photo of the caulking action inside the plotting room before application of the black caulking material.



Below CPT(CH) Uhler is making adjustments to the new shell rammer. He is cutting off a portion of the rammer shaft and will then fit it to the new rammer head. 2LT Gonzales is preparing to assist in holding the shaft to keep it from moving.



Below is the new wooden rammer head prior to affixing the new rammer shaft.



2LT Gonzalez continued the caulking work by sealing the plotting room door.



The photo below shows the new caulking between the door frame metal.



Early in the afternoon the team opened up Gun #1 to make adjustments to the traversing gear linkage and prepare for practice gun drills. The team that opened Gun #1 is shown below.



The photo below shows part of the Saturday working team.



Throughout the day on Saturday we hosted public visitors. Below PVT Hill talks with several visitors on the Gun #1 platform.



Below RCT Kleeman is cleaning the breach block area and preparing it for Sunday's loading drills.



Below the working team looks on in absolute "shock" at the success of fitting various parts to the traversing system together before re-installing them on Gun #1.



In mid-afternoon we took time out to have lunch in the plotting room. This is always a good time to discuss the work underway and what is next.



In the Chemical Warfare room, 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse work on sorting and organizing medical materials.



The Medical Department display's purpose is to demonstrate how Fort Hancock's troops were medically supported in 1943, the technology of the period, and the organization of battle casualty treatment. Nurses are wearing field uniforms for training purposes. Nurses normally served at the Fort Hancock Station hospital and in that setting their normal uniform was Nurse's White duty dresses. However, if nurses were deployed forward with unit aid stations, they would wear field uniforms such as those in these photographs.

Below is a photo of the medical displays as covered Saturday in preparation for Sunday.



Another photo of the displays with the M1 Collective Protector to the right in the photo. This is a Chemical Warfare overpressure and decontamination system but without its air filter. The filter is in a separate display box.



Saturday evening we had dinner in Bldg #21, a restored officer's home built in 1939 that is restored and available for rent at www.sandyhookrentals.com. PVT Hill gets a plate of cupcakes as CPL Cusano, 1LT Lutkenhouse, 2LT Cusano and CPT(CH) Uhler celebrate a birthday!



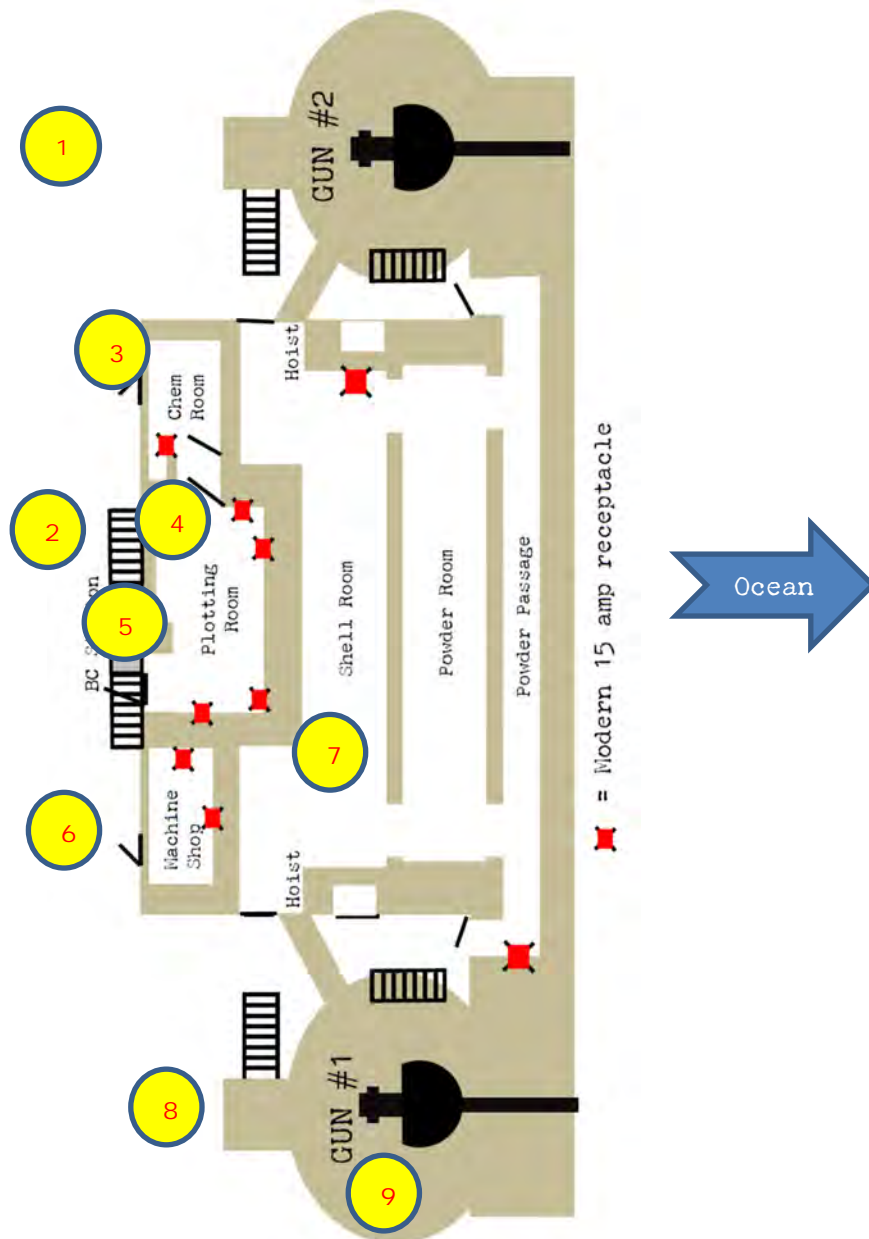
The team is enjoying a good laugh - CPL Cusano on the left and T-4 Tunison on the right.



Sunday the Battery was set up with nine "interpretive stations" as outlined below. The "entrance" was combined with the Chemical Warfare and Medical Operations. These stations operated throughout most of the day.

- A) Station #1 (TBD - Entrance Check Point - Interior Guard Mount)
- B) Station #2 (Chemical Warfare)
- C) Station #3 (Medical Operations & M1 Collective Protector)
- D) Station #4 (Plotting Room)
- E) Station #5 (Battery Commander's Station)
- F) Station #6 (TBD - Machine Shop)
- G) Station #7 (Magazine - Ammunition & Mine Operations)
- H) Station #8 (Chaplain)
- I) Station #9 (Gun #1)

Each station was manned until a Gun Loading Drill was conducted on Gun #1. These drills were conducted at the top of the hour from 1200 until 1600. During each gun drill most of the members would close their stations and proceed to the gun platform.



Below the team begins setup of Gun #1 at about 1000 hours. The powder bag is in front on its tray, and the loading implements and rack are to the right.



The photo below shows the breechblock with the reproduction M1900 firing device installed.



2LT Gonzalez installs the shell table for Hoist #1 in preparations for gun drills.



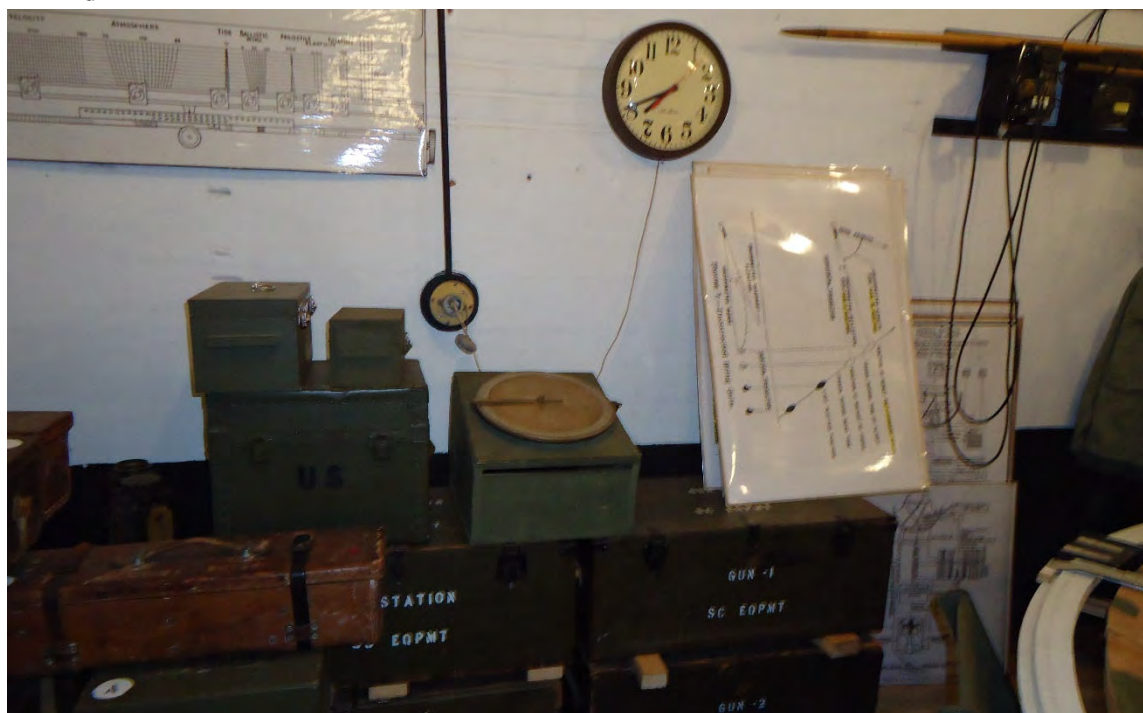
The Battery Commander's station is shown below with two EE-91 telephones, an M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument on pedestal, and MC-153 Time Interval Bell. This station is ready for visitation!



We opened at 1100 hours and immediately had visitors. Below 1LT Taylor speaks with a visitor at the M3 Plotting Board.



The photo below shows some of the charts to explain the firing data calculation process. One of the key instruments, a "Wind Component Indicator" made in 1906 and used through WWII. It is the brass disc just below the power receptacle for the wall clock. The three EE-91 fire control telephones are shown to the right and a poster of the "Range Correction Board" is shown on the left.



The M1 Range Percentage Corrector is shown below. This is where the final range calculations are made and then transmitted by telephone to the guns.



Below is an M1905 Deflection Board. This is where the final calculations for either Deflection (sight offset) or Direction are made and then sent by telephone to the guns. All three of these fire control instruments are very rare.



The photo below shows the plotting room with the M1905 Deflection Board on the left and the M1 Range Percentage Corrector to the right. Both are almost immediately below their respective EE-91 telephones.



Below is the plotting board, with the three EE-91 telephones for the board to the right, the Wind Component Indicator in the center below the electrical receptacle and the M1 Range Percentage Corrector to the far left under another electrical receptacle.



The photo below shows the BD-95 switchboard, the EE-91 telephone that is part of it, telephone terminal box that connects it, a EE-86 Time Interval Apparatus (makes the bells ring) and a 1940s West Bend 50 cup Coffee Pot (most important).



Left to right is a reproduction solid state Time Interval Apparatus; an actual EE-86-A time interval apparatus (with cover off showing rotating timing discs), the EE-91 telephone and left side of the BD-95 telephone switchboard. The light OD colored box affixed at tabletop level on the left of the table is the telephone power supply (22 volts DC). Under the table is visible an assembly of 20 C-111 telephone coils that are the Direct Current (DC) power source for the telephones.



One of the most significant displays was the Chemical Warfare equipment belonging to CPL Bujdos and RCT LeBlanc (who joined us from Texas). Below LTC Welch, CPL Bujdos and RCT LeBlanc are wearing the Army's service gas mask.



Below CPL Bujdos and RCT LeBlanc stand in front of the Chemical equipment and uniform display. The large item in the plexiglass case on the right is an actual air filter from an M1 Collective Protector.



A closer look at the display showing decontamination sprayer on the left (very rare), several different and rare gas masks, detecting and decontaminating equipment.



The two mannequins below show a permeable uniform on the left and a impermeable (butyl rubber) uniform on the right - both very rare today. Between them is a decontamination air filter for the M1 Collective Protector in its display case.



Below the medical displays are uncovered and ready for visitors. The large instrument to the right is a 1943 Picker Field X-Ray machine.



Another view of the medical displays. The door leads into the decontamination air lock for entry into the plotting room.



Below is a long view of the M1 Collective Protector. The medical department case on the left holds syringes and other medical instruments.



At 1100 hours all displays were ready. Below CPL Bujdos and RCT LeBlanc are ready to receive visitors.



Below 2LT Gonzalez explains the M1910A1 Azimuth instrument inside the Battery Commander's Station.



Below 2LT Gonzalez helps a visitor use the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument to view New York City.



1LT Taylor is discussing plotting room operations with visitors.



Below 2LT Cusano is discussing medical operations with visitors outside the Chemical Warfare Room which hosts the medical operations displays.



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse discussed some of the medial materials with a visitor.



And the discussion continues!



Below is a view to the back of the Battery showing from left to right the entrance to the Chemical Warfare room (Medical displays), the Chemical Warfare Displays under the Battery Commander's Station, the doorways to the plotting room and Tool Room (Machine Shop) and the gun platform and Chaplain's station.



The view below is from the Battery Commander's station looking on the Gun #1 platform with visitors.



Below is the Shell Magazine with several project displays focused on electrical lighting such as platform lights and wall lights.



The photo below shows the powder magazine with powder cans in racks on left and right and the M2 Submarine Mine in the center back wall.



Below the team is preparing for gun drills on Gun #1.



Below T-5 Morrison, 1LT Taylor and 1st Sgt Murray discuss the loading operation.



Below are several of the gun drill team preparing for the drills. Left to right are T-5 Morrison, CPL Cusano, PFC McCoy, 1st SGT Murray, and 1LT Taylor.



Another view of Gun #1 with Gun #2 in the distance over the Gun #1 tube.



1LT Gonzalez installs the temporary shell table for Hoist #1. The original metal shell table was removed by the Army in 1964. A replica will be installed when the NPS does its concrete restoration work in the next few years. Until that time, the wooden table shown here meets the requirement to capture shells as they come up the hoist.



2LT Gonzalez tests the table as the shell that T-4 King sent up lands on the table in the correct manner.



At 1200 hours, the public gathers as the team prepares for the drill.



Each member of the gun crew takes their positions as LTC Welch outlines what the public is about to see. The goal - complete the drill in 15 seconds. The team from left to right is CPL Cusano, LTC Welch, RCT LeBlanc, CPL Bujdos, RCT Kleeman, 1LT Taylor, 1st SGT Murray, and T-5 Morrison.



The team continues to prepare as each member's duties are explained to the public.



Below Hoist #1 has the shell cart positioned on the shell table, with a shell ready to go.



Another view of the gun crew with the powder bag on its tray in the center of the picture.



Below 1st Sgt Murray sets the elevation of the gun tube to the loading angle - 90 mils - about 5 degrees.



Below a tugboat is through the M1904 telescopic sight mounted on the M1900 6-inch rifle (Gun #1). This telescopic sight was cleaned and restored by AGFA to include a new reticle wire in the center.



Below is the entire gun team - ten members - which is the bare minimum required to serve the gun. From left to right is 2LT Gonzalez, 1LT Taylor, RCT LeBlanc, CPL Bujdos, RCT Kleeman, 1st SGT Murray, T-5 Morrison, LTC Welch, PFC McCOy and CPL Cusano.



After the gun drills, CPL Bujdos and RCT LeBlanc conduct a persistent agent decontamination of the gun. This is the first time a decontamination drill has been conducted at the Battery.



Below CPL Bujdos uses an early 1941 period Chemical Agent detection kit to simulate determining what the chemical agent is before determining the correct method to decontaminate the M1900 seacoast rifle. Both members are wearing permeable uniforms with the chemical protective hoods, masks and gloves - all very rare and in new-old-stock condition.



Once the chemical agent is confirmed, the team began the process of decontaminating the gun. This is a new interpretation that we will continue refining in future events.



The photo below shows the entire Sunday team and Law Enforcement Ranger Kimberly Casanova who visited the Battery in the afternoon. Left to right is LTC Welch, 1LT Lutkenhouse, 2LT Cusano, PFC McCoy, 1LT Taylor, 1st SGT Murray, RCT Kleeman, RCT LeBlanc, CPL Bujdos, T-4 King, CPL Cusano, Law Enforcement Ranger Casanova, CPT(CH) Uhler, T-3 Komorowski and 2LT Gonzalez.



After the last gun drill, T-4 King, who was the hoist #1 operator, left to continue work on his current project - drilling out the new wall light castings. The two photos to the left below show the castings as we received them from Cattail Foundry in October 2021 and the far-right photo shows a wall light fully restored.



Below T-4 King is drilling the fixture for the side cable connectors. His next action will be to thread the hole to fit the cable fixtures.



The photo below shows a closeup of the fixture turned on its side and clamped into a frame to drill the hole. Notice the cutting oil to the left and the shavings from the bronze fixture. Bronze is a soft metal and often binds the drill bit. This requires care and focus to drill the hole correctly.



Below is the same photo - but all of it - showing T-4 King drilling out the light fixture. These fixtures are part of the Corps of Engineers 1915 Electrical Standard package for seacoast fortifications. The originals were manufactured by Crouse and Hinds in the 1915-1930 time frame. Most of the light fixtures were actually commercially used, but, the wall light fixtures were exclusive to the Army. This is why AGFA had new fixtures cast. This is part of the Mortar Battery electrification project.



At 1630 hours the team began the process of putting materials away and packing up personal displays. Below CPL Bujdos and RCT LeBlanc pack up the Chemical warfare materials.



Below CPL Budjos and RCT LeBlanc take the Chemical filter to the magazine. RCT LeBlanc is grabbing a rope that will be use for lowering drill shells from the upper shell table.



CPL Cusano, CPL Bujdos and RCT LeBlanc stand by as 1st SGT Murray unhooks a 6-inch drill shell from the top of the hoist station. The shell was lowered using a rope with a link attached to the extraction bar in the base of the shell.



Below PFC McCoy applies cosmoline to the exposed metal parts of Gun #1 traversing gears to protect them during the winter.



2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse disassemble and pack the medical displays.



At the end of the day CPL Cusano, PFC McCoy, 2LT Gonzales, 1st SGT Murray and 1LT Lutkenhouse stand by the plotting board before closing the Battery down.



Another "Fort Hancock Days" weekend comes to a close and we look forward to seeing more visitors in 2023!

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/planyourvisit/index.htm>. or visit the Army Ground Forces Association Website at <http://armygroundforces.org>.