

Coast Artillery Living History Ft. Hancock, NJ

On 25-27 October 2024, 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.

2024 marks the 81st year since Battery Gunnison was restructured with the two M1903 6-inch disappearing guns removed and the two M1900 6-inch barbette rifles installed and the battery being renamed Battery Peck.

The members of AGFA who participated during the weekend were Jacob Ansley, Callum Bujdos, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Joel Gonzalez, Richard King, Bryce Kleeman, Henry and Mary Komorowski, Noah LeBlanc, Anne Lutkenhouse, Joe McCoy, Larry Mihlon, Eric Meiselman, Liz Bukowski-Meiselman, Tom Morrison, Wally Tunison, Tony Antonucci, John Uhler, Shawn Welch and our guest Joe Ratti.

There were three major components to the weekend; (1) the Harbor Defense Lantern Tour on Friday evening; (2) AGFA's annual business meeting and dinner on Saturday and (3) Fort Hancock Days event on Sunday.

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 service of the guns, ammunition service in the magazine and loading drills on Gun #2.

The photo below shows most of the participants on Sunday, 27 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.



Friday began with opening Gun #2 (north gun) and setting up the entire gun platform.



Below Mr. Mihlon provides technical oversight as SGT Cusano and PVT Ansley continue to assemble and prepare Gun #2 for the Harbor Defense Lantern Tour.



As members continue to unload display materials from their personal collections, Mr. Mihlon and PVT Ansley chat next to Mr. Mihlon's 1938 Plymouth.



The Battery Commander's Station was established by 1300 hours. Below Mr. Mihlon looks at the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument on its concrete pedestal.



Below 2LT Cusano and SGT Cusano begin to prepare the medical station inside the Chemical Warfare mechanical room.



Below the Medical station is approaching 90% set up for public exhibit.



The Chemical Warfare exhibit in the powder magazine is seen below.



Below is another view of the chemical warfare exhibit.



The view below shows Chemical protective masks and (inert) chemical munitions such as artillery and mortar shells and a chemical agent dispenser.



Below is the artillery ammunition display focusing on 3-inch and 90mm shells and various types of artillery fuses.



At about 1600 hours, the team gathered in the plotting room to eat dinner and discuss the coming lantern tour details. From left to right the three most visible members are 1LT Lutkenhouse, SGT Cusano and SGT Meiselman.



Below is another view of the team eating and discussing the upcoming tour - 2LT Cusano, SGT Cusano, 2LT Gonzalez, CPL Bujdos, PVT LeBlanc, and PVT Ansley.



The tour team departed Battery Peck and headed to the Post Guard House. Below left to right is PVT Ansley, PVT LeBlanc and SGT Meiselman.



Below the tour team is headed down the Multi-Use Path towards the Post Guard House.



The sun went down at the same time we started our lantern tour. Below PVT Ansley walks with a group of visitors.



One of the places we stopped was the Harbor Defense Command Post (HDCP) or "mortar battery". We guided the tour through one corridor to see a door we had repaired and then departed the structure heading for Battery Peck.



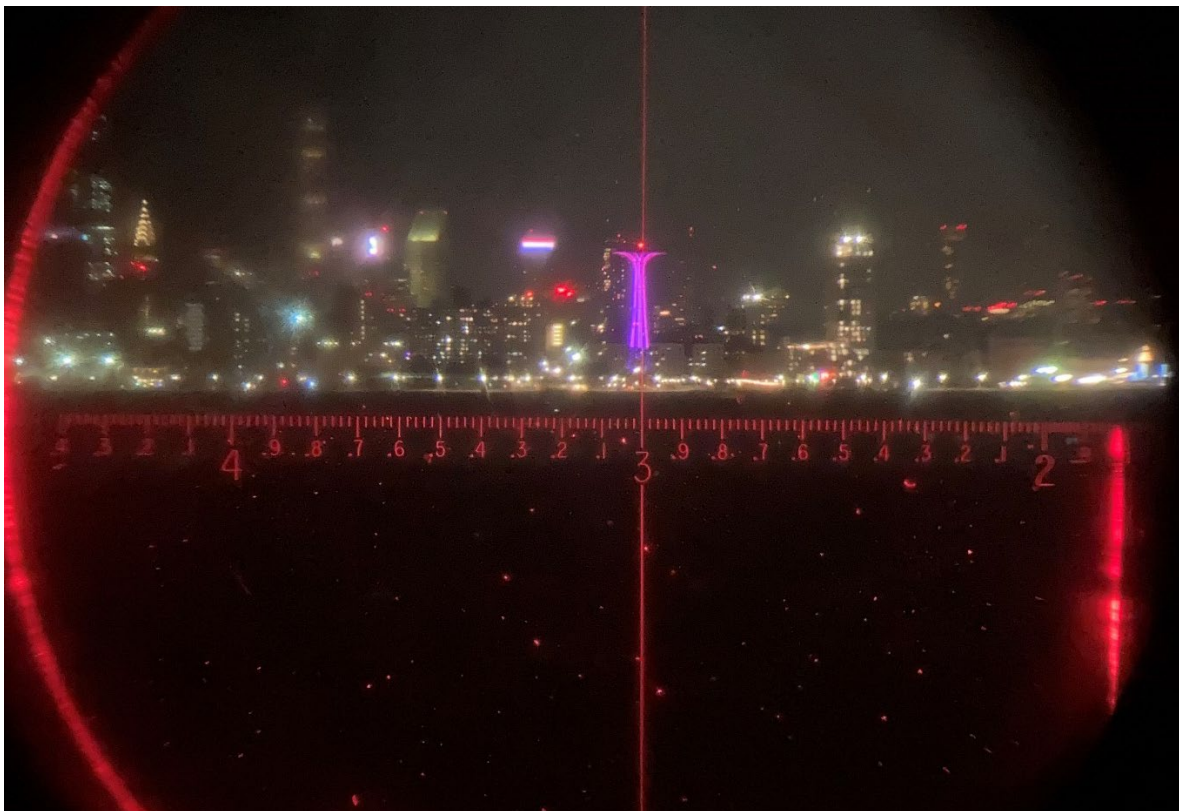
In the photo below we see three components of the tour - lower left is entrance into the magazine, on top center is the Battery Commander's Station and to the right is Mr. Mihlon's 1938 Plymouth.



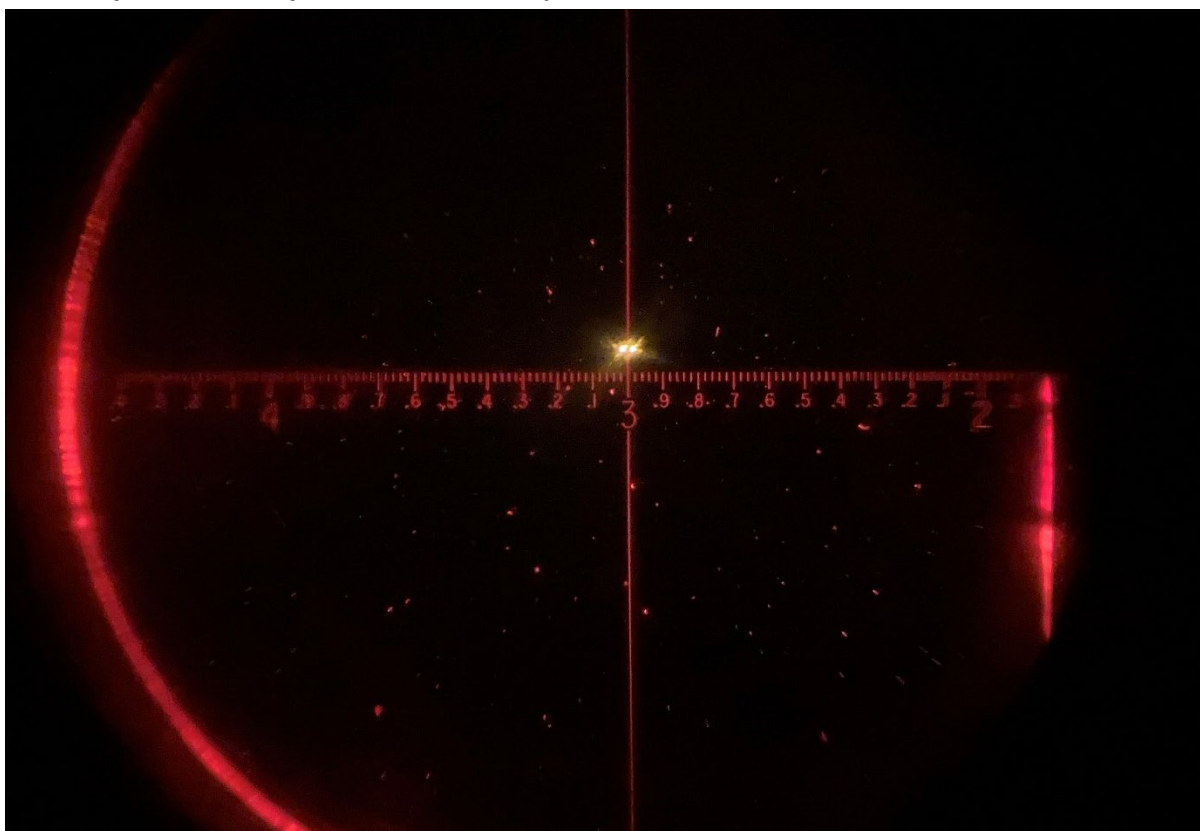
Below 2LT Gonzales works with visitors as they take pictures through the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument.



The photo below is one of the images the visitors could have taken - this is the Coney Island Jump Tower in the center of the reticle.



Looking out towards sea, visitors were able to actually see ships at about 10,000 yards to 20,000 yards distance (7 to 13 miles). When the ships are displaying lights, they are easily seen in the M1910A1's view.



While there was no moon out during the event, the lights of New York City are visible in the distance.



Inside the powder magazine, CPT(Chaplain) Uhler discusses the role of the Army Chaplain in helping maintain discipline and moral in an Army organization.



In the shell magazine, T-5 Morrison and PVT LeBlanc discuss the various munitions stored inside the magazine.



In the plotting room, T-3 Komorowski discusses how the plotting room works with visitors.



In the medical room, 1LT Lutkenhouse, 2LT Cusano and PVT Bukowski-Meiselman take a break between tour groups.



In the Machine Shop, Mrs. Komorowski discusses machine operations with visitors.



In the powder magazine, CPT(CH) Uhler discusses the role of Army Chaplains.



T-5 Morrison and PVT LeBlanc take a break at the munitions and artillery fuse table in between groups of visitors.



Mike Piersa, the Historian at the National Museum of Industrial History (www.NMIH.org) chats with PVT Ansley.



Mike Piersa is viewing NYC through the M1910A1 as 2LT Gonzalez explains how the instrument works.



One of the important additions to the M1900 guns is the lighting system for the fire control instruments on the gun itself. Easily seen on the center-top of the gun is the light illuminating the elevation drum.



Another view of Gun #2 as members continue discussing the materials with the public.



At about 2130 in the evening (9:30pm), our visitors departed and our members began to break down all the exterior exhibits. Below SGT Meiselman and PVT LeBlanc begin the process of removing the EE-91 telephones.



PVT LeBlanc places the telephones, head and chest sets and handsets into the storage footlocker.



The final act of the evening is placing the breach cover on the gun after locking down the carriage.



Below SGT & PVT Meiselman are definitely enjoying the evening on the Gun #2 platform.



The telephone booth (left) is about to be closed for the evening and CPL Bujdos (right) is preparing to go out and retrieve the telephone wire and store it inside the booth.



After we finished for the night, our visitor Joe Ratti shared a pie with the team. To the right SGT Cusano is enjoying a slice of pie!



At about 2300 hours (1100pm) the team returned to the barracks (Bldg. #102).



Below SGT Cusano arrives in the kitchen to get a snack.



SGT Meiselman, PVT Bukowski-Meiselman, 2LT Gonzalez and 2LT Cusano prepare for a night snack.



At about midnight, the ladies are showering and SGT Meiselman discusses chemical warfare materials with CPL Bujdos and PVT Ansley.



Saturday morning PVT LeBlanc fixed scrambled eggs and the team sat down to a hearty breakfast in preparation for the Annual Business meeting.



After the meeting, SGT Meiselman and PVT Bukowski-Meiselman set out on a two hour walking adventure around the main post area of Fort Hancock.



Below SGT Meiselman stands next to Mr. Mihlon's 1938 Plymouth with the Sandy Hook Light House in the background.



At 1730 hours, the team gathered on the porch of Bldg. #102 for a group photo before our dinner.



Shortly after the photo was taken, the team from the Mule Barn Tavern arrived with our catered dinner! Below Lindsay Nila (general manager) and Dan Ferrise (owner/leaseholder) <https://www.mulebarntavern.com/>



Dan, Lindsay and Dan's son and daughter helped get us all set up for dinner in record time.



Our guests began arriving around 1800 hours.



As more visitors began arriving, the team gathered in the dining area.



The buffet provide by Mule Barn Tavern was a big hit. Below Mr. & Mrs. Mihlon, CPT(CH) Uhler, SGT & Mrs. Meiselman matriculate through the buffet line.



And SGT Meiselman heads back for seconds - a truly happy cosmoliner!



Below LTC Welch, CPL Bujdos, PVT Ansley and SGT Meiselman provide a photo opportunity.



Below conversations continue as SGT Kleeman chats with Patti Rafferty, the Chief of Resources (cultural and natural).



On the left SSG Kleeman, Leo Da Silva (NPS Fort Hancock acting manager), 2LT Gonzales and CPT(Dr.) Cusano chat. On the right is Rick Jenkins (Gateway NRA Chief of Interpretation and Education) and his wife Hannah Ryan.



Below, the evening is a wrap and final good byes begin. Left to right is 1LT Lutkenhouse, Jen Nersesian (GATE Superintendent), her husband Luis, Mrs. Weiselman and CPT(Dr) Cusano.



Sunday morning came bright and early - below CPL Bujdos and PVT Kleeman stack the serving dishes from Mule Barn Tavern.



Breakfast was quick and served on paper plates as we needed to be at Battery Peck by 1000 hours.



Below PVT Kleeman and CPL Bujdos await other members to arrive from upstairs to prepare for movement to Battery Peck.



Below, Gun #2 is being opened and prepared for the day.



Inside the powder magazine CPL Bujdos gathers PFC McCoy and PVT Kleeman for quick reviews of various Chemical warfare items on display.



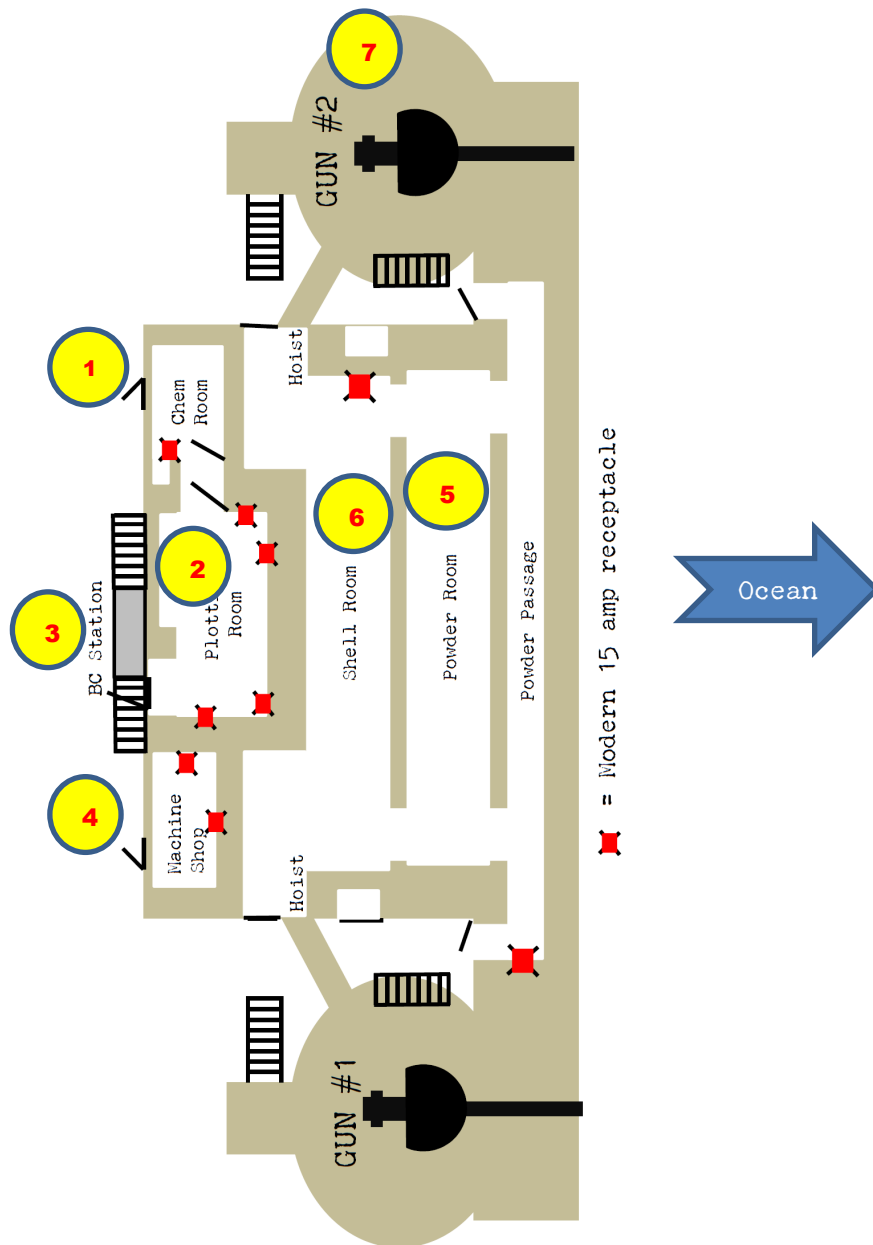
Mr. Mihlon has set up his 1938 Plymouth as 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse prepare for the day.



On Fort Hancock Days (Sunday 27 Oct) the Battery was structured with the “interpretive stations” as outlined below. These stations operated throughout the day.

- A) Station #1 (Medical Operations & M1 Collective Protector)
- B) Station #2 (Plotting Room)
- C) Station #3 (Battery Commander’s Station)
- D) Station #4 (Machine Shop)
- E) Station #5 (Chemical Warfare)
- F) Station #6 (Magazine - Ammunition & Mine Operations; restoration projects)
- G) Station #7 (Gun #2)

Each station was manned until a Gun Loading Drill was conducted on Gun #2. For gun drills members would close their stations and proceed to the gun platform.



Gun #2 is prepared and PVT LeBlanc, SGT Cusano and PVT Kleeman chat awaiting the public.



Before the public arrived, AGFA members gathered on Gun #2 for a quick picture to memorialize our team for the day.



As visitors began arriving, T-5 Antonucci and PFC McCoy chat under Gun #2's gun tube.



Another view of Gun #2 as the public experiences what it is like to operate an M1900 6-inch seacoast cannon.



Below is the Battery Commander's Station looking from the ocean side.



The station up close shows 2LT Gonzalez and a visitor looking through the instrument.



The discussion on the instrument continues as our visitor learns more about the station and how it operates.



Below is a good view of both guns, the 1938 Plymouth, the Battery Commander's Station and the doors into the machine shop and the plotting room.



Mr. Mihlon discusses wartime rationing and the impacts to civilian lifestyles the war created in 1943.



Below the team prepares for a gun loading drill.



Visitors chat with PVT Ansley regarding our projects.



PFC McCoy and PVT Kleeman discuss the various Chemical Warfare items with visitors in the powder magazine.



Below are various gas masks from our allies and enemy nations.



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano discuss various medical items with visitors.



2LT Gonzalez is tracking a ship using the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument.



The ship he is tracking is below.



Visitors are gathered at Gun #2 to observe a loading drill.



Another view as we prepare for a gun drill.



The gun crew is in position for loading. From left, PFC McCoy has the rammer, SGT Cusano has the sponge, PVT LeBlanc is standing by to open the breach as T-5 Antonucci is controlling elevation and 2LT Gonzalez is tracking a ship. PVT Ansley and PVT Kleeman are standing by (right) with the shell and tray and CPL Bujdos has the powder bag and tray.



PFC McCoy rams the shell as PVT Ansley and PVT Kleeman prepare to drop the shell tray.



PFC McCoy now rams the powder charge into the chamber.



PVT LeBlanc has just closed the breach and LTC Welch is running up with the primer to insert it into the firing device. This entire drill was conducted in 14 seconds - within the required 15 seconds.



The team now chats with the public about how the gun works and lets them experience how the gun works.



As the public gathered for the next drill, 1LT Lutkenhouse discusses some of the work we have done to restore the Battery.



Below is a daytime view of the entrance to the magazine, the Battery Commander's Station, the entrance to the Chemical Warfare room and the 1938 Plymouth display.



Visitors head to the Battery Commander's Station. Medical station door on left.



2LT Gonzalez stands in the Battery Commander's station, the M1910A1 on the right.



And the ship the instrument was focused on is below.



The end of the day has arrived and CPL Bujdos, PFC McCoy and PVT Kleeman begin the process of locking down the M1900 6-inch rifle.



Below PFC McCoy wipes the grease off the elevation wheel in preparation for its return to the storage box.



PVT Kleeman and CPL Bujdos take the communications foot locker with the telephones, handsets and head/chest sets.



Later that evening 2LT Gonzalez and PVT Kleeman have returned the serving materials to the Mule Barn Tavern which is less than 500 feet from the Barracks.



Once we all returned to the barracks Sunday evening, the remaining team members had a dinner of leftovers from our annual meeting.



PVT Ansley, SGT Cusano, PVT LeBlanc, PVT Kleeman and CPL Bujdos enjoy a great meal and relax after a long and fun weekend.



Another "Fort Hancock Days" weekend has come to an end. By the early evening most members had gone and the remaining team will depart in the morning. 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>.