

Coast Artillery Living History
Fort Hancock, NJ

On 17-19 May 2019, the National Park Service (NPS) conducted the annual spring Coast Defense and Ocean Fun Day (sponsored by New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium - (<http://njseagrants.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*".

The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Doug Ciemniecki, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Richard King, Henry and Mary Komorowski, Anne Lutkenhouse, Eric Meiselman, Tom Minton, Mike Murray, Paul Taylor, Wally Tunison, John Uhler, Gary Weaver, Bill Winslow and Shawn Welch. AGFA guests included Chris Picarello, and John Kelly.

The event had the following major components: (1) the Harbor Defense Lantern Tour on Friday evening; (2) Saturday workday at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck; (3) Coastal Defense/Ocean Fun Day on Sunday. The Ocean Fun Days component of the event was hosted by New Jersey SeaGrant Consortium and AGFA had two separate activities; (a) Military Vehicles and Chaplaincy display at the event bus staging area and (b) Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck.

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

AGFA focused 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 from Sunday 19 May shows that day's participants in front of the Battery Commander's Stairs.



Between October 2018 and May 2019, several projects were undertaken and substantially completed. The most visually significant projects that were completed include:

- A) Reintroduction of the Gun #1 "gun pointer's" telephone box. AGFA was fortunate to acquire one of these historic gun boxes. The box itself was manufactured sometime between 1915 and 1920 as part of the first series of fire control telephones. This particular box was damaged and T-4 Ciemniecki repaired the broken top cover, removed rust, primed and painted the box. The box is shown below with a EE-91 telephone with HS-30 headset installed and ready for interpretation.



- B) Initial cleaning and painting of the Gun #1 Sight Cradle. The sight cradle was unfortunately damaged during the movement of Gun #1 in 1964 and again in 1975. The traversing assembly bent and locked in the far left position. We are evaluating how best to proceed in repair. The elevation mechanism was able to be repaired. The cradle was stripped of paint, moving parts lubricated, and on Friday 17 May was reinstalled as shown below.



Several other major projects are underway including (1) fabricating and reinstalling the chemical warfare valves and reproduction filter; (2) new cover for the breach of each gun; (3) elevation board operator's platform; (4) Hoist #1 restoration; (5) restoring second platform light for Gun #2.

Friday's work started roughly at 1100 hours with "activation" of the Gun #1 platform. Gun #1 was moved to Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck in April 1943 so was "present" in May 1943. Gun #2 did not move until 21 May 1943. Below SSG Minton and our guest Chris Picarello install the elevation board operator's telephone.



Below SGT Meiselman prepares the M1904 sight cradle for re-installation on the gun.



By early afternoon the Gun #1 platform was prepared for the lantern tour. Below the powder tray and shell tray with drill shell are shown.



Another view of the gun #1 platform showing the loading implements, signal corps footlocker and rifle rack. Gun #1 is ready for business!



There are several storage boxes for all the medical equipment - below 1LT Lutkenhouse and SGT Meiselman take a box into the powder passage for temporary storage.



The photo below shows all the medical storage boxes stacked in the powder passage. The Chaplain's display is to the right. During the lantern tour visitors exited via this corridor..



In the photo below the medical station in the Chemical Warfare mechanical room takes shape. Notice all the boxes for the vintage equipment - all destined for temporary storage in the powder passage.



The medical display underwent a change that enabled access to the Chemical Warfare motors and systems. During the lantern tour the medical station moved visitors to the plotting room through the chemical decontamination air lock.



Later in the afternoon, CPT(Chaplain) Uhler arrived and parked his jeep by Gun #2 platform. TSG Weaver and SGT Meiselman stand by to help CPT Uhler unload his chaplain displays.



Many members worked through lunch. Below, T-4 King and T-5 Tunison take a break in the machine shop for lunch. To the left is a new machine - a shaper from 1940.



By the middle of the afternoon the Battery Commander's station was complete and ready with an M1910A1 azimuth instrument, MC-153 time interval bell and two EE-91 telephones.

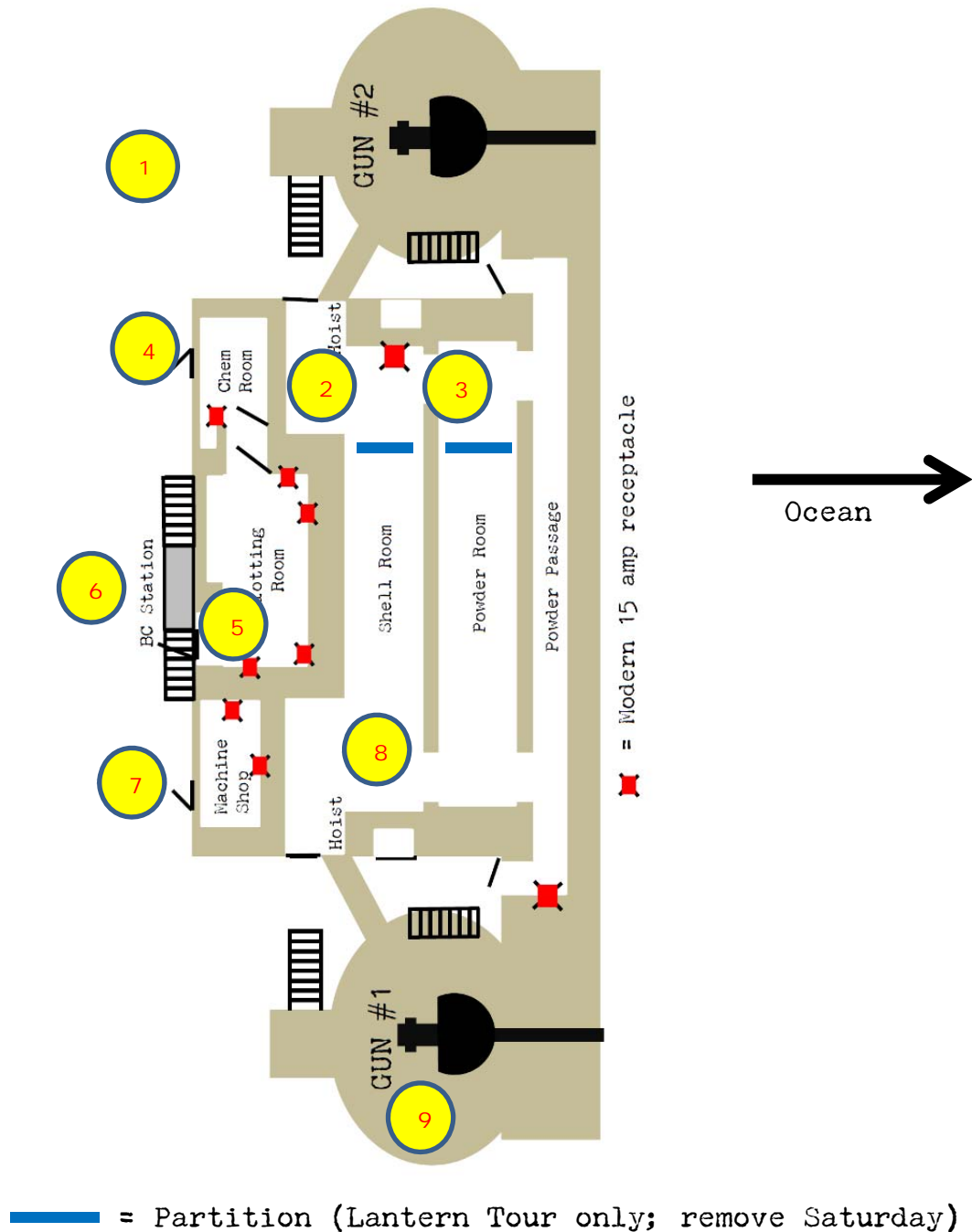


Below the AGFA team for the Lantern Tour takes time out for a picture before moving to the start of the tour.



There were nine stations for the lantern tour as follows:

- Station #1 Initial greeting area and creating small groups at Battery
- Station #2 Mine Warfare
- Station #3 Chaplain
- Station #4 Medical - Chemical Warfare room
- Station #5 Plotting Room
- Station #6 Battery Commander's Station)
- Station #7 Machine Shop
- Station #8 Magazine - ammunition
- Station #9 Gun #1



Below our guest Chris Picarello, followed by TSG Weaver, SGT Miselman and T-5 Tunison, are heading to the tour start point - the Fort Hancock Museum (Guard House).



Below TSG Weaver and Ranger Susanne Moore chat while the tour group gathers outside the Sandy Hook Lighthouse.



The lantern tour pauses in front of the Sandy Hook Lighthouse for a brief discussion of the lighthouse in WWII.



Below SSG Minton uses an AN/PIQ-5 "Bull Horn" from the 1950s. This is a very useful item that aids our public interpretation.



As the Tour Team was moving with the public group towards the battery, the membership at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck continued preparation. CPT(CH) Uhler's jeep is to the left of the battery.



The photo below provides a great view of 6-inch Gun M1900, Serial Number 23 manufactured at Watervliet Arsenal in 1903. The reproduction firing device is installed as is the wiring harness for the on carriage fire control lights.



Once the Tour arrived, we split the 100 or so visitors into eight groups that would visit each station for approximately 10-15 minutes each. In the photo below, 1LT Taylor motions to a group of people to follow him to the Plotting Room. This was Station #1 at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck during tour.



As visitors move to their stations, NPS Ranger Suzanne Moore takes a picture.



In Station #2, TSG Weaver explains the shell hoist and the mine field system that protected the harbor channel.



Another view of TSG Weaver's station, including the M2 mine case which is the large black object to the center-right in the photo.



Visitors then moved to Station #3 and learned about the Chaplaincy from CPT(CH) Uhler.



Another view of the Chaplain station illustrates the extent of the exhibit's materials and documentation.



Below is the entrance to Station #4 - Medical and the Chemical Warfare system.



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse discusses a small packet of antibiotic powder as 2LT Cusano holds the small package up for all to see.



Below 2LT Cusano provides guidance as a young visitor tries on a medical bag yoke and belt.



Just before the signal to move is given, T-5 Ciemniecki provides an overview of the Chemical Warfare system as he prepares to guide visitors through the decontamination air lock to the Plotting Room.



Below T-5 Ciemniecki guides visitors through the decontamination station into the plotting room (Station #5).



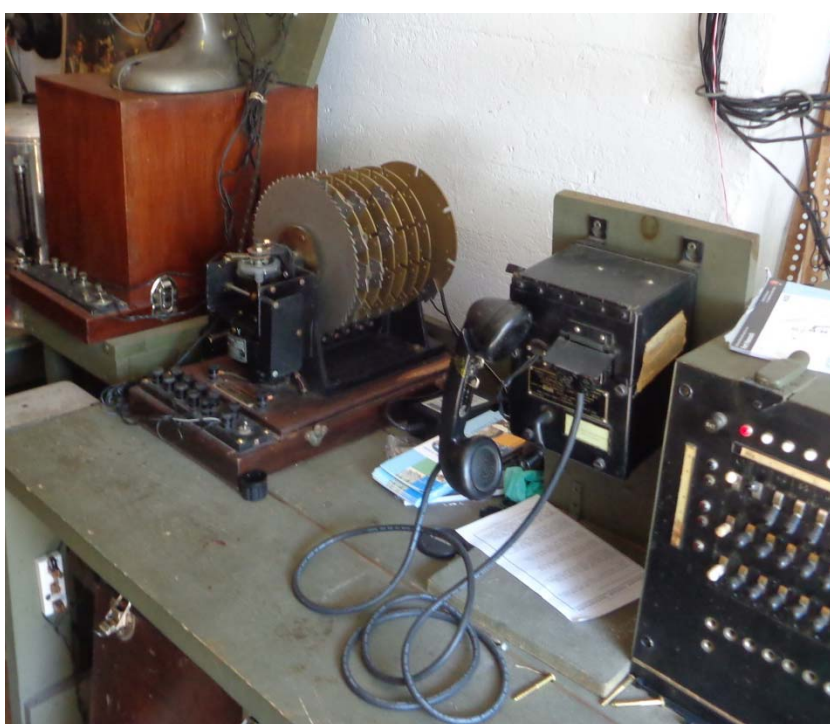
In the Plotting Room, 1LT Taylor provides an overview of the fire control process.



The plotting room has many vintage and reproduction instruments. On the left is the M1905 Deflection Board. On the right is the M1 Range Percentage Corrector. Both have telephones above them for the operators to send either corrected range or corrected deflection (or azimuth) to the elevation setter or gun pointer.



On the left is the Wind Component Indicator - a device that calculates the impact of wind on the travel of the projectile. On the right is (1) a reproduction Time Interval Apparatus; (2) an original EE-85 Time Interval apparatus with the cover off showing the rotating disks and; (3) part of the BD-95 fire control switchboard and its EE-91 operator's telephone.



Below the illuminated the Battery Traverse shows the entrances to the Chemical Warfare room (medical) and the plotting room and visitors in the Battery Commander's Station.



The view below is looking up the stairs to the Battery Commander's Station (Station #6) from the Chemical Warfare room side of the battery traverse.



The photo below provides a great view of what visitors saw through the M1910A1 azimuth instrument when they looked at New York City. The instrument is centered on the Chrysler Building.



Some visitors were lucky and able to see one of the many ships that were passing in the channel in front of Fort Hancock.



As the evening progressed, many people enjoyed each station.



In Station #7, the Machine Shop, T-3 Komorowski demonstrates the Shaper using a large piece of plastic. This unique machine from 1940 is essential to much of our work to include the upcoming project to make a new "gun arm" for the M3 plotting board.



In Station #8, T-5 Tunison is shown below guiding visitors through the magazine. Here is discussing one of our major projects - the restoration of the vintage shell hoist for Gun #1.



Below T-5 Tunison discusses the various types of ammunition with our visitors.



Station #9 was the Gun #1 platform. Below the team conducts a Gun Loading Drill.



Another view after the conduct of the drill as visitors look at the breach block.



After our visitors departed, we began the job of closing up for the evening. Below CPL Cusano carries the Gun Traversing Hand Wheel back to the gun box in the magazine.



Morning came and we gathered for breakfast in the kitchen in Bldg #41, which was our barracks for the weekend.



We began arriving at the Battery by 1030 in the morning. Below TSG Weaver steps out of the Plotting Room in his reproduction Fort Hancock Baseball uniform cap and top to surprise our early morning visitors.



However, tasks awaited and TSG Weaver and SGT Meiselman got onto clearing the gutter drainage system on top of the battery.



SGT Meiselman uses a scraper to remove the dirt and debris from the drainage gutters.



Below the gutters are shown on the Gun #2 side of the battery after they are cleared and the soil is moved back to ensure drainage.



On Gun #1, CPL Cusano applies a fresh coat of Olive Drab (OD) paint to the M1904 sight mount.



Below is the M1904 sight mount after painting.



Gun #2 received very special attention this Saturday. In 2007, the gun's traverse became exceedingly strained. The manual is not clear on how to oil the thrust bearing and it took us about six years to get the process down using Gun #1. This weekend we had enough members present to actually do the work on Gun #2. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse brings lunch to the team while SGT Meiselman prepares to push on the gun tube as TSG Weaver applies solvents to the lubrication channels.



Below SGT Meiselman and LTC Welch push on the gun tube as TSG Weaver applies solvents and then oil.



Once the lubricants are applied, TSG Weaver, SGT Meiselman and LTC Welch continue to pull the gun barrel to traverse the carriage.



Below SSG Minton, TSG Weaver and SGT Meiselman take a break from the lubrication mission on Gun #2 to chat with our visitors.



In the Machine Shop, T-3 Komorowski works diligently on two key parts for the Chemical Warfare filter valves. These valves are one of a kind and the parts are not available commercially - we had no choice but to make them ourselves.



Below are the new parts on the left (special screws) and the original in very bad condition on the far right.



Below is the AGFA team that participated in the Saturday workday at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck.



The evening in Bldg #41 was quite nice and low key. Below we are eating crackers and cheese as we discuss all things 1943 Harbor Defense of New York.



Sunday morning we ate breakfast and began preparing for the day. Below our guest John Kelly, CPL Cuasno and 1LT Lutkenhouse enjoy each other's company.



Just prior to breakfast, CPT(CH) Uhler prepared his jeep for the day's event.



As soon as we arrived, our visitors were waiting on us. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano engage our visitors with the medical displays and the M1 Collective Protector in the Chemical Warfare mechanical room.



Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano finish their medical discussion and prepare to demonstrate the Chemical Warfare system.



Throughout the day T-3 Komorowski was busy with visitors and completing projects for the Chemical Warfare M1 Collective Protector. Below he just finished showing a visitor how to use the milling machine from 1940.



In the Machine Shop, both T-4 King and T-3 Komorowski show the public how the shaping machine works. This view is looking through the window into the machine shop.



On the main post side of Fort Hancock, CPT(CH) Uhler set up his jeep and chaplain's display. This area is next to the NOAA laboratory and the parking lot was used as the staging area for Ocean Fun Days bus movements. This was the perfect location for CPT(CH) Uhler to engage the public regarding Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck and the military chaplaincy of the WWII period.



Another view of the chaplain's exhibit.



At Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck, Mrs. Komorowski interpreted a Westinghouse Radar war worker and together with 1SG Murray interpreted the Battery Commander's station and its M1910A1 azimuth instrument.



Our visitors were very interested in the M1910A1 and below a young visitor gets a clear view of New York City.



Another visitor looks through the M1910A1 at New York City as Mrs. Komorowski explains the use of the instrument to a younger visitor.



In the photo below 1SG Murray explains the operations of the Battery Commander's Station to visitors. This view is from the Gun #1 platform.



In the photo below 1SG Murray is tracking a ship in the M1910A1 azimuth instrument.



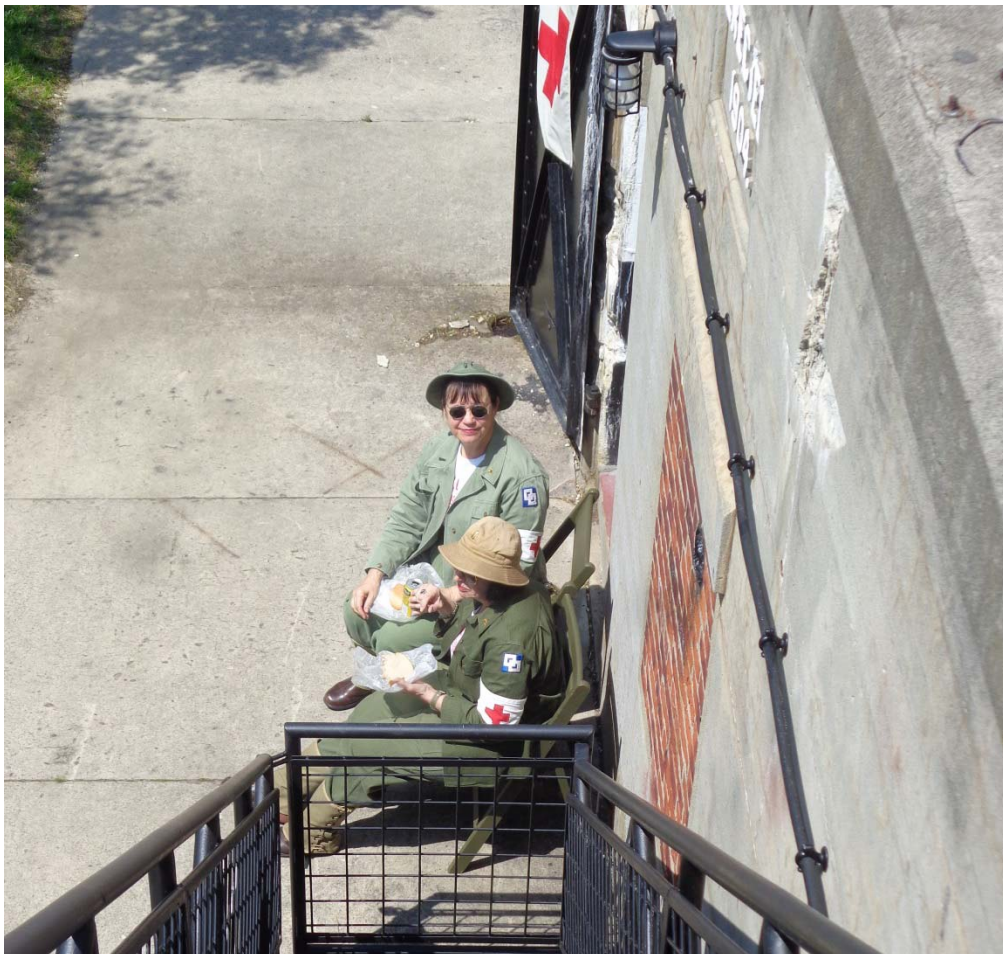
In the photo below one can just make out the ship on the center line. The horizon is very hazy as one can tell by the difficulty in actually seeing the ship.



The Gun #1 platform was busy most of the day. Below about 15 visitors learn about the gun and operate selected components of the weapon.



Lunch was something members ate as the opportunity presented itself. Below 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano get a momentary lull in visitation and are able to eat their lunch in rare solitude! The view is from the top of the Battery Commander's Station.



The Gun #1 platform stayed busy throughout the day. This view is from the Battery Parade.



Below AGFA guest John Kelley demonstrates parts of the gun as CPL Cusano walks over to get an implement to start a gun drill.



Our guest John Kelly is showing our visitors how the M1904 telescopic sight operates and how to traverse the gun to track a ship.



The view through the M1904 telescopic sight shows a small ship that is about to be “tracked” by the gun.



Inside the magazine, T-4 King explains the various parts of a projectile to a visitor. To his left are several of our upcoming "restoration projects" - four platform lights from the 1915 time period.



As the day continued, T-5 Ciemniecki assisted T-4 King in munitions interpretation and magazine tours.



1LT Taylor provided nearly continuous interpretation in the plotting room. Technical questions were constantly asked and the public's interest stayed continuous throughout the day.



Below a visitor to the plotting room asks questions about the time interval system and the fire control telephone system.



Before we knew it, the weekend was over and it was time to return equipment to storage inside the magazine. Below T-5 Ciemniecki, 1SG Murray, CPL Cusano and CPT(CH) Uhler pack away mess equipment.



Below, 1LT Lutkenhouse, 1SG Murray, CPL Cusano and T-5 Ciemniecki return mess materials to storage in the magazine. During event weekends we are often preparing meals for as many as 20 members - so our mess supplies are robust and flexible.



AGFA will conduct Public work days in July, August and September. Please visit the NPS website (<http://www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/index.htm>) for additional event/workday information or call (732) 872-5970. The work dates are on Army Ground Forces Association Website <http://armygroundforces.org>. or visit the "Battery John Gunnison/New Battery Freemont Peck" Facebook page.