

History House 1943 Coast Artillery Christmas Celebration Ft. Hancock, New Jersey

On 14-15 December 2019, the National Park Service (NPS), supported by the Sandy Hook Foundation (<http://sandyhookfoundation.com/>) and Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) presented a 1943 Christmas Celebration at "History House" located at Fort Hancock's Historic Post, part of the Sandy Hook Unit of Gateway National Recreation Area, which is located within the Fort Hancock Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark District (the entire Sandy Hook Peninsula).

The members of AGFA who participated in the event were Paul Casalese, Doug Ciemiecki, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Renee and Joel Gonzalez, Ricard King, Anne Lutkenhouse, Tom Minton, Tom Morrison, Wally and Linda Tunison, John Uhler, Bill Winslow, and Shawn Welch.

The educational objective was to provide an interpretation of the Harbor Defense soldiers of Fort Hancock as they would have celebrated Christmas in 1943.

The photo below shows the participating membership and guests on Saturday in the parlour room of History House. The home was built in 1897, and completed just in time for the outbreak of the Spanish American War in 1898. Designated originally per Army standards as a "Lieutenant's House", the home is 4,500 square feet and was intended for one junior officer and family. History House is known formally as "Quarters 1" and is one of 18 homes which comprise "Officers Row," one of the most visually appealing features of Fort Hancock's Historic Post.



Before we focused in on History House, several AGFA members went to Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck to move the powder cans in preparation for construction of a new, historically correct, set of racks to store the cans. Below are four of six stacks of cans that were moved - over 200 cans total were moved.



This is Gun #2 powder passage showing about 48 cans already relocated to the passage.



Below 2LT Gonzalez, CPT(CH) Uhler stand by after moving all the cans.



The photos below show the entire Gun #2 powder passage full of about 250 powder cans. CPT (Dr) Cusano looks at the full passage after we completed our work.



Once the powder can movement was done, we began to arrive at History House. Below 2LT Gonzalez and PVT Gonzalez arrive.



That Saturday was a very foggy day as you can see below.



The front of History House was prepared for the public and open by 1200 hours.



Below CPT(Dr) Cusano and 2LT Gonzalez read various documents before the public arrives.



Below CPT(CH) Uhler prepares his field organ and 1LT Lutkenhouse chats with a visitor. She wears the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) M1940 off-duty blue Dress and 1st pattern ANC service cap - most appropriate to Fort Hancock/Zone of Interior.



Once the organ was set up, 1LT Lutkenhouse gave it a quick test run.



Below PVT Gonzalez, portraying a Women's Army Corps (WAC) soldier, speaks with Brian Samuelson who leases Bldg #21 (www.sandyhookrentals.com). Brian and Joe have done a wonderful job of restoring the home and it is available NOW for you to rent!



Below T-5 Tunison, 1LT Lutkenhouse, T-4 King and CPT(CH) Uhler chat as the public begins arriving.



T-4 King, T-4 Ciemniecki and 1LT Winslow talk about the counterweight work underway for Gun #1. T-4 King holds a casting pattern for a cast-iron yoke. CPT(Dr) Cusano listening to the conversation near the stairway to the second floor.



Earlier in the morning while the powder cans were being moved, T-4 King and T-5 Tunison were fitting the yoke pattern to the rear recuperator cylinders of gun #1.



Below PVT Gonzalez, 2LT Cusano and 1LT Lutkenhouse sing as 1LT Lutkenhouse plays the organ.



Park Volunteers helped with final setup as seen below in the living room.



PFC Morrison stands next to a very new acquisition for AGFA - a 1920 display board of standard Army fuses.



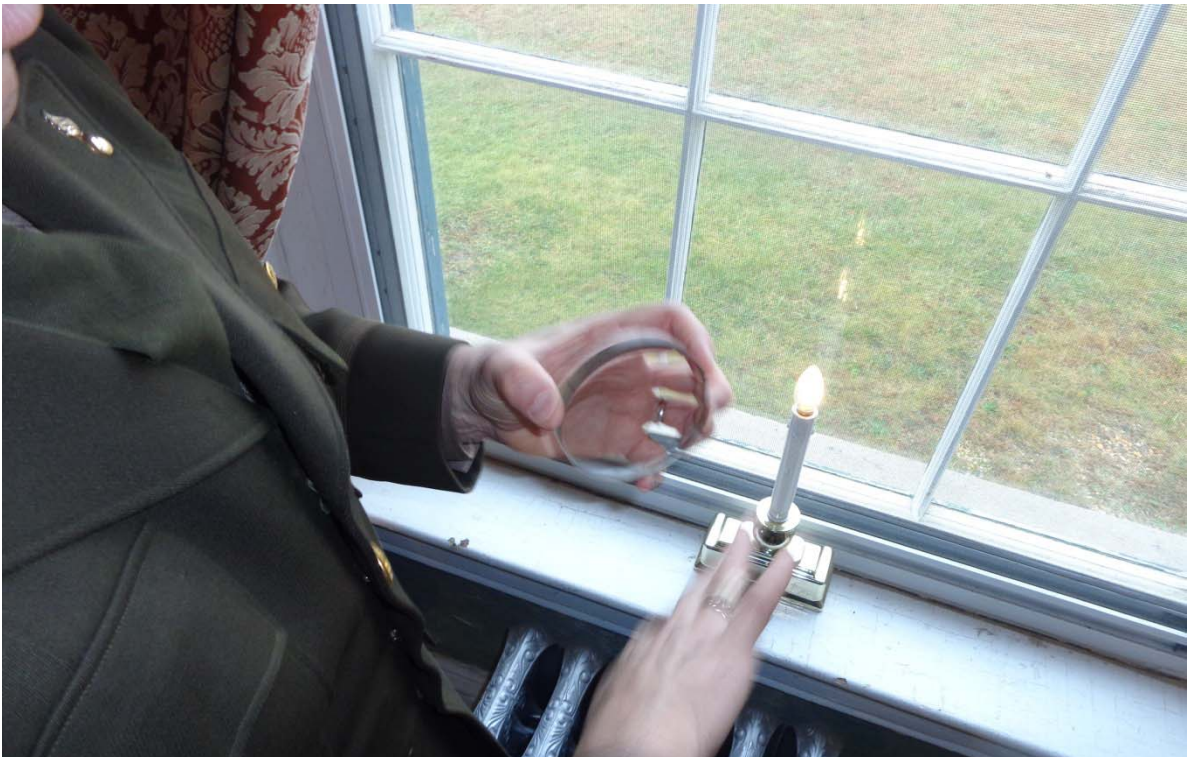
The board was made in 1920 at Frankford Arsenal in Philadelphia and is extremely rare. Most of the fuses are sectionalized to show their working components. The top three fuses are time fuses, the three long fuses in the middle are point detonating, the two small top fuses are base detonating, the two small bottom fuses are point detonating, and the bottom three large fuses are all base detonating fuses for heavy armor piercing projectiles. All were tested and perfected at the Sandy Hook Proving Ground between 1890 and 1919.



Below PFC Morrison explains the board to visitors (left) and 2LT Gonzalez is explaining the objective lenses of an M1910A1 azimuth instrument.



Below 2LT Gonzalez shows the two lenses together in the natural light of day. 2LT Gonzalez is an electrical engineer and optician and has repaired and adjusted all of AGFA's optical fire control instruments.



Below 1LT Winslow and PFC Morrison share a laugh as they examine the fuse board.



In the photo below Barney Sheridan chats with PVT Gonzalez and 1LT Lutkenhouse. Barney is the lease holder for Bldg #53 and will be opening a sandwich shop and restaurant in the summer of 2020. We look forward to his grand opening!



Towards the end of the afternoon the AGFA team ventured outside on the front porch and the wind was howling!



Once everyone had their coats on, we took a picture to memorialize the day.



Sunday morning the Sandy Hook Foundation (www.sandyhookfoundation.com) held a special thank you for their major donors, NPS and AGFA members with fantastic fare for all. Below T-4 Ciemniecki, PVT Gonzalez, 2LT Gonzalez and CPT(CH) Uhler enjoy the food and great conversation.



1LT Lutkenhouse and PVT Gonzalez are with Lillian and Don Burry (center). Lillian is a member of the Fort Hancock Federal Advisory Committee (www.FortHancock21.org), a Monmouth County Freeholder and member of the Fort Hancock Federal Advisory Committee.



2LT Cusano at the Sandy Hook Foundation donor luncheon where the conversation was lively and the food was excellent.



Our hosts from the Sandy Hook Foundation were fantastic and did a wonderful job. The historic kitchen was an excellent resource to support preparation of our wonderful fare!



History House is a superb setting for those who treasure historic places such as Fort Hancock to gather and plan their preservation.



At 1300 hours the special luncheon ended and the dining room table was re-arranged with historic documents and information for the visiting public to learn more about Fort Hancock.



PFC Morrison spent most of Sunday explaining the fuse board to visitors. One of the most important aspects of these fuses was their "bore safe" features - a critical safety feature developed at the Sandy Hook Proving Ground.



At 1400 hours Santa arrived!



Many visitors arrived specifically to see Santa. Below families **queue** up to visit with Santa!



For over 90 minutes Santa was visited by at least 50 children - each with a special request!



A pause in the action as LT(jg) Casalese (USCGR) from the Harbor Entrance Control Post (HECP) takes time to visit with Santa. The HECP was critical to managing all shipping entering or leaving New York Harbor during WWII.



During the afternoon, 2LT Gonzalez and CPT(CH) Uhler spent quality time practicing on the field organ.



Throughout the day visitors kept the AGFA team busy with questions regarding Fort Hancock and WWII.



Below left LTC Welch shows a young visitor the "Seacoast Cannon Coloring Book" that AGFA provides for a \$10 donation. It shows many of the cannon used at Fort Hancock. On the right LTC Welch and CPT (Dr) Cusano discuss some of the restoration work that AGFA has done at Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck with a Sandy Hook Foundation board member.



Below CPT(Dr) Cusano and PFC Morrison discuss various items in the Sandy Hook FogHorn, which was the weekly newspaper of Fort Hancock from 1941 to 1945.



A very special attraction was Brian Samuelson's historic 1948 Chrysler New Yorker (Highlander Edition) shown below as Santa makes his departure to get back to work for Christmas!



At the end of the day, we took one final picture of the Sunday team.



During the winter Battery Gunnison/New Battery Peck's exterior will be open for self-guided tours. For information call the Sandy Hook Unit, Fort Hancock & Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark Visitor Center (732) 872-5970, <https://www.nps.gov/gate/planyourvisit/index.htm> or visit <http://armygroundforces.org>