

Coast Artillery Living History Ft. Hancock, NJ

On 1 June 2013, the National Park Service (NPS) in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) conducted the annual spring Coastal Defense Days public event at Fort Hancock, NJ. Coastal Defense Days showcase Fort Hancock's rich military heritage using tours and programs at various locations throughout Fort Hancock at Sandy Hook.

The members of AGFA that participated in the event were Ron Brodzinski, Donna Cusano, Paul Cusano, Chris Egan, Kathleen Kluxen, Henry Komorowski, Anne Lutkenhouse, Eric Meiselman, Kyle Schafer, Jerry Still, Paul Taylor, Gary Weaver, Deanna Weaver, Shawn Welch and guests Yvonne Fitzer, Mary Komorowski and Erika Still. We also hosted a display by WWII Navy Veteran LT(jg) Robert Krause. The tactical focus of the event was the ongoing U-boat war in the Battle of the Atlantic, the threat of saboteur activity or the shelling of Fort Hancock by German submarines using deck guns, and the role that Battery Gunnison/New Peck played as Advance Harbor Entrance Command Post (HECP) #1's Examination Battery.

The effects of Hurricane/Super Storm Sandy in October 2012 were still present overall for the National Park Service and had a very significant negative impact on the NPS's ability to support the event. Specifically, housing was not available, truncating the usual three-day event to one day. The usual Lantern Tour for the public on the Friday night was a Hurricane/Super Storm Sandy casualty as was the usual Saturday interpretation hours.

The photo below shows the participating membership and guests on 1 June in front of Battery Gunnison/New Peck plotting room entry.



The most major impact of Super Storm Sandy to AGFA was the loss of electricity to Battery Gunnison/New Peck. This prevented the usual operation of dehumidifiers within the battery which are on year-round to protect sensitive and delicate materials which includes telephones, fire control equipment, paper items, and other water sensitive materials. During previous worktrips members had placed all these materials in plastic bags with desiccants to help prevent damage to them. The electricity to the battery was restored less than 10 days before this event. In the photo below 2LT Still, 2LT Taylor and PFC Meiselman are re-installing the fire control telephones in the plotting room after removing them from the temporary plastic protective bagging.



Even though we were impacted by the storm, restoration work continued through worktrips over the winter and early spring, as evidenced below by the new cable hangers in the powder magazine, below. In this photo Miss Kluxen and Mrs. Weaver man the lunch service to ensure all members are fed.



Another view of the completed and installed cable hangers is shown below – the powder passage to Gun #1 is now 100% complete for period lights and historic cable hangers.



In preparation for the plotting room instrument construction project to be led by T-5 Komorowski, Miss Yvonne Fitzer familiarizes herself with a 1940's lettering machine that will be used to mark the arms and such on the "new" plotting room instruments as they are built over the next couple of years.



Below, Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Robert Krause, a WWII Naval Aviation primary flight training officer, discusses Naval aviation at his display as Erika Still joins him.



Throughout the day the public and AGFA members spent time with LT(jg) Krause as he discussed naval aviation and his experiences in the Second World War.



The Medical station was hosted in the Chemical Warfare room by 1LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Cusano shown below at the entrance to the display.



An overall view of the medical display looking towards the plotting room is shown below.



Gun #1, 6-inch M1900 seacoast rifle serial number 22, manufactured in 1903 at Watervliet Arsenal, and its crew, were the center-piece for the day. Shown below are 2LT Still, PFC Egan (holding a powder charge), T-4 Brodzinski, RCT Schafer (holding shell tray), PFC Meiselman (holding practice 6-inch shell), SSG Weaver and PVT Cusano. These seven members kept the gun platform hopping throughout the day with drills and demonstrations for the public.



In the photo below, members prepare for a gun drill.



Another view of preparations is shown below with 2LT Still, PVT Cusano and T-4 Brodzinski discussing next steps near the breach of the gun.



Below, 2LT Still points to the battery commander's station while the rest of the members pause in the gun drill as the public asks questions.



As gun drills were conducted at Gun #1, 2LT Taylor escorted other visitors through the magazine and the plotting room. Below 2LT Taylor is shown with two visitors in the shell room with the shell hoist for Gun #2 in the background.



As the afternoon progressed, other members took breaks outside the medical station and in the magazine. Below SSG Weaver sits with Mrs. Still and Mrs. Komorowski, who is wearing a new set of HBT Coveralls which she will use to build her Women's Army Auxiliary Corps interpretive impression.



Below a final public tour embarks upon Gun #1 platform with the gun crew.



As the day's event ended, the members slowly disassembled all the key items on Gun #1 firing platform and returned the items to the gun armament chest and tool room.



As the day ended, RCT Schafer, LT(jg) Krause, 2LT Cusano, T-5 Komorowski and PVT Cusano pose for a picture as Mrs. Schafer and 1LT Lutkenhouse converse in the background.



Throughout the summer of 2013, AGFA members will be offering guided tours of Battery Gunnison/ New Peck. The Battery will be open on selected weekend days. For additional information call the Fort Hancock National Landmark and Sandy Hook Visitor Center at (732) 872-5970.

For more information, visit the Army Ground Forces Association Website <http://armygroundforces.org>