

Coast Artillery Living History Ft. Hancock, NJ

On 16-17 May 2009, the National Park Service in conjunction with the Army Ground Forces Association conducted the annual spring Coastal Defense Day at Battery Gunnison/New Peck, Fort Hancock, NJ.

The members of AGFA participating were CJ Gutch, Erick Meiselman, Tom Minton, Mike Murray, Shawn Welch, Curtis Saunders, Larry Winchell, Anne Lutkenhouse, Paul Taylor and Kieren Fletcher. We were most lucky to have a special guest, Dave Ostlund, from the Kodiak (Alaska) Military Museum, which is housed in the magazine for an 8-inch gun casemated seacoast battery. Interpretation, including uniforms and equipment, was designed to present a view of the Coast Artillery at Fort Hancock in May of 1943.

The educational objective was to provide interpretation of the Coast Artillery mission at Fort Hancock in the World War Two era with a focus on the movement of the guns from Battery Peck to Battery Gunnison in April and May 1943 – creating Battery Gunnison/New Peck! The tactical focus of the event was the ongoing U-boat war and the threat of saboteurs or shelling by submarines. The event also addressed, the operation of the Advance Harbor Entrance Control Post (HECP) Number 1 at Fort Hancock and the role that Battery Peck/Gunnison played as Advance HECP #1's Examination Battery.

The photo below shows the participating membership on Saturday 16 May. This day was focused on work and preparation for the full NPS "Coastal Defense Day" which was conducted on Sunday, 17 May.



Work actually began on Friday afternoon (15 May). In the photo below 2LT Taylor and PVT Meiselman begin the arduous task of cleaning and polishing the rotating bands for the 6-inch High Explosive shell bodies we received in August. This work of cleaning and painting 6-inch shells continued into late Saturday afternoon.



While the shells were being cleaned and painted, PFC Saunders began work on the rotating gears of Gun #1. The task at hand was to remove all the grease that was fouled with sand and replace it with new grease. Here PFC Saunders liberally applies GAA (Grease, Automotive and Artillery) to the rotating gears.



The photo below shows PFC Saunders working late Friday afternoon under the shield of the gun cleaning and greasing the rotating gear teeth. This was a significant undertaking as the gear teeth were jammed with old grease fully mixed with sand – a true abrasive compound. Cleaning this out of the teeth, which are bronze, is critical for smooth operation of the traversing gears.



The next day (Saturday) started foggy and cool. In the photo below PVT Meiselman, PVT Fletcher and 2LT Taylor prepares to leave housing for Battery Gunnison/New Peck. PVT Meiselman wears the Army Blue Denim fatigue uniform, while 2LT Taylor and PVT Fletcher wear the 2nd pattern Herring Bone Twill (HBT) combat uniform.



In the photo below, PVT Meiselman, PVT Gutch, PVT Fletcher and Dave Ostlund (Kodiak Military Museum, Alaska) tackle the hard job of cleaning, polishing and painting the 6-inch High Explosive shell bodies.



Dave Ostlund holds a 6-inch projectile he has just completed painting. These shell bodies weigh approximately 85 pounds. The Coleman 242B lanterns on the wall at left provide much needed lighting inside the shell magazine. The magazine awaits a further lighting restoration to the service installed in 1943.



Preparing the communications system to operate on Gun #1 platform was another major task. Here LTC Welch connects the telephone cable from inside the plotting room to the terminal box in Gun #1 telephone booth. The three discs on the wall to LTC Welch's right are actually speaking tubes and they do work.



As LTC Welch worked on the communications system, PFC Saunders worked with the team on Gun #1's traversing gears. The worm gear is visible in the photo through the gun shield opening. The gun tube is above the gear housing.



In the photo below, the team of CPL Minton, CPL Winchell and PFC Saunders work on the gun's traversing gears.



For lunch, 2LT Taylor set up his M1942 vehicle stove and fried SPAM for the troops. In this photo, PFC Saunders looks on as PVT Meiselman, PVT Fletcher and other members move through the chow line.



In the photo below, we have advanced to cooking the evening meal at the battery. As this was a larger meal (Dinty Moore Stew and Rice), LTC Welch used an M1941 stove made by Coleman in 1942 and 2LT Taylor used a mountain stove. The entrance to Battery Gunnison/New Peck's tool is to the right of 2LT Taylor, and the plotting room entrance is to the left of LTC Welch.



The reason AGFA personnel prepared and ate the evening meal at the battery was to prepare for a night lantern tour. In the photo below, 1st Sgt Murray discusses the operations of the Harbor Entrance Control Post (HECP) with a group of visitors on top of Battery Potter, which served as the HECP starting on 1 May 1943. To the right of the group is an M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument. The instrument in this view is covered pending arrival of the tour group.



The photo below shows PFC Saunders patrolling outside of Battery Gunnison/New Peck awaiting the tour to arrive at the battery.



Below 2LT Taylor and CPL Winchell explain the plotting board and fire control in the plotting room to approximately 15 visitors. During the tour, we broke the group into two sections of about 20 people each. The total tour was about 40 people.



The photo below shows 1st Sgt Murray demonstrating the breechblock of Gun #1. This is the first time we have actually installed the block, though it is not yet fully functional. By this time of the evening, it is dark and it is difficult to see ships at sea. The night lantern tour ended at almost 2200 hours – taking almost three hours to execute.



Once the tour ended, we closed the battery down and were back at the barracks by 2230. Sunday was a new day and some new AGFA members arrived, as others had to leave. The photo below shows Sunday's team in front of the NCO house where we all were billeted. The photo includes LTC Welch, 2LT Still, SSG Weaver, PFC Saunders, CPL Minton, PVT Meiselman, PVT Fletcher, 2LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Taylor.



The photo below shows PFC Saunders at the entrance control check point. At this station, the public would enter, receive an overall briefing, obtain their security badges, and enter the Battery area.



On the platform of Gun #1, 2LT Still, PVT Meiselman and CPL Minton instruct visitors on the workings of the M1900 6-inch seacoast rifle.



While visitors were at the gun platform and plotting room, SSG Weaver provided detailed instruction to the public on the care and maintenance of seacoast ammunition. This photo shows about 1/3 of the available 6-inch High Explosive shells have been painted and are on display. The remaining 60 or so shells are on the rack to the right awaiting painting. A large 16-inch 2,240-pound Armor Piercing shell is shown in the rear left of the photo.



SSG Weaver provides ammunition instruction to visitors in the photo below.



While visitors learned about ammunition and the gun platform, others learned about medical aspects of supporting coast artillery soldiers. 2LT Lutkenhouse and PVT Fletcher show visitors how to carry a stretcher.



PVT Fletcher explains medical material inside the chemical warfare room of Battery Gunnison/New Peck.



2LT Lutkenhouse's collection of medical material is significant and encompassing. From bandages to splints to period glass syringes to needles and needle sterilizers, it is a very complete collection. The two shelves are in the location of the air purifier housing for the Chemical Warfare room. The large pipe behind the shelves was used to bring fresh air in to the air filter for the plotting room. An Army Coleman lantern from 1944 provides the light for the room in the bottom of the photo.



2LT Still provides instruction on the M1900 6-inch seacoast rifle. He is explaining the manufacturing dates and details to the visitors.



Each visitor is afforded the opportunity to spot ships with the gun's 3-inch M1904 telescopic sight. Notice the large container ship being spotted by the gun crew.



The members of the Sunday contingent pose at the end of the day behind Gun #1. This is the first event since 2003 where we have used Gun #1 as the armament focus. Our goal is to have it capable of traverse and conducting a loading drill by the October 2009 event. Additional work will be undertaken during June and August and the fruits of those efforts will be showcased during our October "Fort Hancock Day" event.



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