

Coast Artillery Living History **24-26 October 2008 Ft. Hancock, NJ**

The Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA) in conjunction with the National Park Service hosted Fort Hancock Day at Fort Hancock, NJ. Fort Hancock Day commemorates the establishment of Fort Hancock by Act of Congress on 30 October 1895, when "The Fortifications at Sandy Hook" were named in honor of General Winfield Scott Hancock, a hero of the battle of Gettysburg in 1863.

The members of AGFA participating were Jonathan Prostack, Andy Grant, Mike Murray, Doug Houck, Shawn Welch, Larry Winchell, Rob LaBerta, Paul Taylor, Tom Minton, Stephen Turner, Vincent Turner, Vincent Turner, II, Anne Lutkenhouse, Cisco Lacey, Roy Hatanaka, Joe Janesic, Bob Grant, Gary Weaver, Curtis, Saunders, Kieren Fletcher, and Eric Meiselman.

Interpretation, including uniforms and equipment, was designed to present a view of the Coast Artillery at Fort Hancock in October of 1943. The tactical focus of the event was the role that Battery Gunnison/New Peck played as the Exam Battery for the Advance Harbor Entrance Control Post No. 1 in addition to the ongoing U-boat war and the threat of saboteurs or shelling by submarines, Axis surface raiders disguised as merchant vessels and enemy capital ships. Key periods of public engagement were Saturday evening from 1800-2100 and Sunday from noon until 1630. Saturday evening's plan was to conduct operations in two locations, Battery Gunnison/New Peck and North Beach where Fort Mott State Park's 1942 60-inch Sperry Searchlight and generator would operate, sweeping the ocean and the sky.

Members began arriving late in the afternoon of Thursday, 23 October to being setup and reception for the members who followed. This ensured flexibility for Friday's operations and preparation to receive one hundred 6-inch projectiles and for the Association's annual meeting Friday evening. In the photo below, LTC Welch, SGT Lacey, CPL Minton, 2LT Lutkenhouse and SGT Hatanaka prepare to down load the shells from the delivery truck.



The download began in two phases with the first being to assemble them on Battery Gunnison/New Peck's parade. This took about 18 minutes.



Once the shells were on the battery parade, the truck was released and movement began one shell at a time into the magazine. There was some trial and error in movement technique. The best solution was to place a pole through the shell body and use a two-man carry. At over 85 pounds apiece, this proved the best solution. In the photo below, SSG Houck and SGT Lacey move one shell into the magazine.



Six personnel working four at a time completed the movement of shells in about four hours. In the photo below, SSG Houck prepares an extension cord beside the new stack of projectiles. These are Navy 6-inch high explosive shell bodies. Radiant Technology donated these shells as a result of their demilitarization work with Crane Army Ammunition Plant in Indiana. We thank Ryan Smith and his staff for their support!



In addition to the storage stack in the main shell room, we also placed six projectiles on the delivery tray for the #2 gun shell hoist.



The other major addition to the battery was the relocation of the communications switchboards and terminal boxes in the plotting room the proper location, the addition of a permanently installed BD-95 fire control switchboard and common battery 24 volt DC power to the entire telephone system. The photo below shows the new location and the new BD-95 switchboard.



While personnel worked to place the new shells in Battery Gunnison/New Peck's magazine, others prepared the barracks for the annual meeting. In the photo below, 2LT Lutkenhouse and 2LT Taylor stand next to the orderly room desks as other members prepare for the annual dinner in their class A uniforms.



The Association's mess capabilities expanded tremendously for this event in the capable hands of member SSG Grant. He skillfully ensured all means were the very best possible and were available at all times required. The Annual Dinner was the best the association has ever had thanks to his superior abilities. SSG Grant, 1LT Grant and PFC Turner help prepare the evening meal for serving.



Almost as an AGFA tradition, fifteen of our members gathered on the stairs of Building 102, the barracks where the association stayed at Ft. Hancock.



Saturday morning began with uniform inspections, equipment adjustments, and training to get everyone ready for public engagement later in the day. 90 minutes was spent in basic drill instruction. Beginning with facing movements, the members progressed to formation marching, cadences and manual of arms training. In the photo below, members receive manual of arms training with M1903 Springfield rifles.



Once drill and Ceremonies was completed, 1st Sgt Murray presented a one-hour block of instruction on the basic setting for the event (Oct 1943) to include period news, trivia and the operating setting to include policies and tactics. After breaking for lunch, the association moved to Battery Gunnison/New Peck for hands on training. CPT Prostack provided a refresher on plotting room operations. This was timely as a light drizzle began which lasted for the rest of the day with only minor periods of letup.



Training continued through the afternoon on ammunition service, plotting room operations and communications system operations. The evening meal was brought to the battery by Jeep and served behind Gun #1. The plan for the evening was altered by the rain and humidity. The decision was made not to subject the searchlight to the weather on the beach given the waves were over four feet high. Instead it was operated at the fire station where it was parked next to the lighthouse. However, the high humidity reduced the ability of the generator to operate since it did not have a humidity control kit for the carburetor to prevent icing. The light did function a few times, with the most spectacular display being when the beam hit the lighthouse lens and produced many beams of light in all directions. Meanwhile, the public braved the weather and showed up at the battery steadily for over an hour. In the photo below, we see a group on Gun Platform #2 as 1st Sgt Murray conducts gun drills with the crew.



Below 2LT Taylor, emplacement officer, SGT Lacy, PVT Meiselman, 1st Sgt Murray and T-CPL LaBerta prepare for the next public group to join in the gun drill. As the photo plainly shows, the rain was heavy enough to generally soak everyone on the gun platform.



The rain made for a long recovery time back at the barracks Saturday evening with weapons cleaning and oiling and laying out of field gear so it would dry being priority activities. The next morning came early with part of the association heading out for a tour of Batteries Kingman and Mills. These batteries were formerly equipped with two each 12-inch M1895 seacoast rifles. Casemated in 1941-42, the structures remain most impressive. Gathering at 0900 prior to the tour and work at the battery, the members posed for a photograph in front of Bldg 102.



While members toured Batteries Kingman and Mills, several other members reported to Battery Gunnison/New Peck to prepare for the public. Below 1st Sgt Murray inspects Gun #2 in preparation for the day.



At the same time, SGT Turner brought the searchlight generator to the Battery Parade.



2LT Lutkenhouse established her medical display in the chemical warfare room of the battery. She was fully equipped to handle the worst possible injuries!



One of the major changes to the conduct of the event was the establishment of a security checkpoint and issuing of "visitors badges" to the public as they entered the "controlled military zone". This worked really great to set the tone and feel for the time period and the threat that Nazi Germany posed for the east coast of the United States.



Once the public was passed through the checkpoint, they were moved to one of five stations. In the photo below, the public gathers on the gun platform for 1st Sgt Murray and 2LT Taylor to provide instruction on the operation of the gun.



In order for the public to get a full feel for the searchlight, at sundown the searchlight was moved to North Beach (sight of searchlight #15 in 1943). The photo below shows the light's OIC, 1LT Grant and the beam in the background.



The final public portion of the event closed out on North Beach at Searchlight #15's location. In the photo below, LTC Welch, SGT Turner, 1LT Grant, 2LT Turner, SSG Grant, SGT Lacy, PVT Meiselman, CPL Minton, 2LT Lutkenhouse, Jeanne Nicholson (History House) and SGT Hantanaka pose with the 800 million-candle power 1942 60-inch Sperry Searchlight beam in the background.



This closed out what was clearly the best public event yet for the Army Ground Forces Association.
For more information, visit the Army Ground Forces Association Website <http://armygroundforces.org>