

## Coast Artillery Living History Reading AAF (Mid Atlantic Air Museum WWII Weekend)

On 4-6 June 2010, Fort Mott State Park, supported by the Army Ground Forces Association, attended the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War Two Weekend at Reading Pennsylvania.

The members of AGFA that participated in the event were Mike Bonaccorsi, Andy Grant, Bob Grant, Doug Houck, Eric Meiselman, Tom Minton, Peter Morrill, Joe Rosamillia, Curtis Saunders, Jerry Still, Stephen Turner, Vincent Turner, Vincent Turner Jr., Gary Weaver and Shawn Welch. Special guests included Mr. Chris Zeeman of the Coast Defense Study Group. The educational objective was to provide interpretation of the Coast Artillery mission during the summer of 1941. Additionally, Fort Mott State Park's 60-inch, 800,000,000-candle power searchlight was on display and operated during Saturday night's "Hanger Dance."

The photo below shows most of the participating membership on Friday, 4 June, in front of selected Coast Artillery munitions from left to right are a 10-inch powder bag, a 6-inch High-Explosive (HE) shell, a 10-inch Armor-Piercing (AP) shell, a 6-inch AP shell (in front of the 10-inch shell) and a 90mm shell. The insignia below the "Organizational Sign" is the crest of the 21<sup>st</sup> Coast Artillery Regiment (Harbor Defense), which garrisoned the Harbor Defenses of the Delaware River, which included Fort Mott, located just outside of Pennsville, New Jersey.



The photo below shows a clear view of the entire bivouac site setup, beginning with the searchlight on the left, the Organizational Sign, the searchlight generator, the display and bivouac tents, the mess tent, and the field shower tent. Separating AGFA's encampment from a public rest area are "obstacles" with imitation barbed-wire.





Below, members of the mess section begin to serve breakfast on Friday morning.



The photo below shows CPL Minton, PVT Rosamilia and 1LT Grant as they continue setup operations on Friday morning. By this time, all tents were up and the majority of the equipment was in place requiring a few final touches of setup which included setting up fire control instruments, connecting phones, activating the Time Interval System, testing switchboards, etc.





In the photo below, CPL Minton, wearing the blue denim utility uniform and M1910 web gear, informs the public and answers questions about various types of Coast Artillery anti-aircraft ammunition. Following World War One, the Coast Artillery received an additional mission to defend America from attack by the air as well as by the sea.



Below, as two visitors depart the Seacoast Artillery Fire Control Station, PVT Meiselman reports to SSG Houck, preparing for the next group of visitors. This station had a M1910A1 Seacoast Artillery azimuth instrument, two EE-91 telephones and an MC-153 Time Interval Bell, which faithfully chimed away with three loud dings every 15 seconds for the duration of the event when the public was present.



There were many living history and reenacting organizations at Reading besides Fort Mott and AGFA. Below, members of a U.S. Naval Construction Battalion (aka "CB" or "SeaBees") work on a jeep before offloading a small bulldozer from its prime mover. The CB's were the units that built many of the airfields on islands liberated from the Japanese in the South Pacific in WWII, allowing Allied planes to fly further and further into enemy territory.



Many wonderful and rare military vehicles were featured at Reading. Below is a White Half-Track, which was used during WWII as the primary method of transporting Armored Infantry (infantry in support of tanks) and as a prime mover for anti-tank guns.





The rare truck seen below is an Army Air Corps fuel truck and was fully operational, being used to refill the various aircraft that flew during the air show, adding a distinct touch of realism to the event for the visiting public.



Staff cars were also present at the event. Below, LTC Welch stands beside a very nicely restored 1941 Plymouth.



On Friday evening, AGFA members gathered at the mess tent to cool off and enjoy the light breeze at the end of the day. The uniform for this part of the event replaced service shirts with "Hawaiian" or standard Tee shirts.



A major change in AGFA operations from the 2009 Reading event was the use of the main (General Purpose or "GP" Medium) tent for personnel bivouac only. In the photo below, PVT Meiselman and PVT Rosamilia prepare for public interpretation on Saturday morning, wearing the khaki service uniform.





AGFA members always eat well, and Reading is no exception. In the photo below, SSG Grant and CPL Turner are preparing a hot breakfast for some very hungry "Cosmoliners" on Saturday morning.



CPL Turner is cooking on original Coleman stoves. Each are dated from the 1940's and provided excellent service and worked flawlessly.





One of the more unique organizations to attend this year's event was a 10 man squad of Japanese Infantrymen. Their officer is pictured below as a group of soldiers eat breakfast behind him. Their field equipment and uniforms were quite accurate, and all had the proper Japanese Arisaka Rifles or Nambu pistols.



The Reading air show lay out is distributed into distinct "theaters" for visitors. In the Pacific Theater section, there was a very nice M3 37-mm Anti-Tank gun, one of two such guns that were at Reading this year.





Another impressive weapon on display was this .30 caliber M1917A1 water-cooled machine gun on an anti-aircraft tripod.



As can be seen in the photo below, the M1917A1 machine gun also had the very rare “flip-up” anti-aircraft front sight.





One of the more impressive setups for the Pacific Theater at Reading was this unit's field kitchen. Notice the three trash or "ash" cans on the right, each with "emersion heaters" which would heat up boiling water for cleaning mess kits and other cookware.



The "flea market" was also very good this year. In the photo below, SGT Turner (driving) and SSG Weaver carefully weave their way through the crowd in a 1944 Ford jeep to take a 6-inch HE shell (painted yellow) to Mr. John Morris, a vendor specializing in artillery equipment, for the potential fitting of a dummy nose fuse to the shell.





VIP's were abundant at Reading. Below, CPL Minton and PVT Rosamilia instruct General Douglas MacArthur on the finer points of coast artillery Fire Control, a complex system of triangular-based position finding based on trigonometric principles. The General was quite interested, staying with AGFA members and asking detailed questions for nearly 15 minutes.



CPL Minton, PVT Rosamilia and General MacArthur review firing data at the Plotting Board, a 180-degree map of the field of fire for a seacoast artillery gun battery, on which target coordinates were tracked and analyzed.





While General MacArthur was visiting the Fire Control tent, PVT Meiselman and SSG Houck have a brief lull in visitation while they man the Fire Control Station. Two such stations, located several miles apart, would be used to relay the position of an enemy ship back to the Plotting Board.



Many visitors were quite interested in the anti-aircraft munitions on display. Here, CPL Minton is swamped by visitors as he explains the different shells and their functions to the visitors.





Visiting the Flea Market was a top priority for all. Below, 1LT Grant, accompanied by PVT Meiselman, PVT Turner, Jr., and SGT Turner sort through various items at one of the vender tents. 1 LT Grant appears to have found himself an original WWII US Army wool blanket.



AGFA members rotated, or took turns, between manning the bivouac site and visiting the flea-market. In the photo below, CPL Minton and PVT Rosamilia prepare to depart for the Flea Market. Visiting the flea market serves another purpose from acquiring fine WWII-era souvenirs; as AGFA members maneuver throughout the airfield, it gives re-enactors, living historians and visitors alike a good chance to interact with the Coast Artillerymen, and get an opportunity to visit AGFA's bivouac area to learn more about the "Concrete Soldiers" who guarded our ports and harbors during WWII.





There were many WWII veterans in attendance at the air show, representing all branches of the Service. We were most fortunate to be visited by Captain (CPT) Gordon Yeuling, of the U.S. Army Air Force, who was a North American B-25 instructor pilot during WWII, training the crews that would take the planes into battle around the world. Below, LTC Welch, SSG Houck and 2LT Still pose for a photo with CPT Yeuling, in front of an aircraft of the type that he flew, the magnificently restored B-25 "Panchito."



Unlike 2009, there were only a few brief periods of rain this year. We were able to protect most of our material from the rain without dismantling it. In the photo below, 2LT Still stands inside the fire control station, next to the M1910A1 Azimuth Instrument with its original canvas cover. The entire telephone and time interval system is seen covered up as well.





The Soviet bivouac site, located just down the taxiway from AGFA, had an outstanding display of crew-served weapons from machine guns to mortars to anti-tank rifles.



In the photo below, several members of the Soviet Army are receiving a briefing for the day's events.





While a majority of the focus of the WWII Weekend is on the front-lines and the individual combat soldiers, the WWII Weekend also features a distinctive and unique “Home Front” section, showcasing the American way of life in the 1940’s, as the United States fought its second global war during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the displays, located in their own area of the show, are a period-correct gas-station, shopping market, a home, and a radio-station with live actors doing the top hits of the era, which includes programs such as “The Lone Ranger.” The station broadcast on XM Satellite Radio. In the photo below, a young woman fuels up a vintage car at the Gulf station.



In the trunk of the car are the preparations for a picnic, complete with basket and chairs.





In the photo below is a very unique and diverse group of German interpreters, mostly focused on the Waffen SS. The soldier on the right wears the tropical uniform of the Wehrmacht, or Army, reflecting service in North Africa or Southern Italy.



Another very unique display AGFA members visited were a US Army field photographer. Nearly all of his original equipment was functional. It was the gallant actions of the combat cameramen of the various branches of the Service, who were shooting film instead of rifles in the heat of combat that provided Americans – then and now – with the stirring and dramatic still and moving images of World War II.





Also located at the WWII Weekend is the “French Village,” a mock-up of a small street in a tiny, nondescript town in France. Each building is occupied and interpreted by one of the living history groups, both German and Allied. The main purpose of the village, however, is so that German and Allied troops can reenact the small firefights that were so frequently seen as the Germans were driven out. The battles usually vary with either side defending or attacking, and winning or losing. There were several such battles fought for the public throughout the day. Below, a European-Theater US Army infantry unit reorganizes after a battle.



The photo below provides a limited view of the buildings that make up the French Village.





One very unique building was this house that served as both a French Family and US family home) in one, separated into two parts.



The US Home Front house interior is pictured below.





The inside of the French home is seen below, with the lady of the house preparing garlic toast for the visitors (it was great!).



The village also featured a very real dress shop, and had many nice vintage ladies dresses and other apparel for sale.





The Café Napoleon proved to be a very “German” place of business – few Allied soldiers were seen inside.



As we headed back to AGFA's area, General Patton provided inspiration and a “butt chewing” or two to the enlisted men as he drove through the airfield in his Dodge Command Car.





Back at the bivouac, SGT Turner prepares to provide information to the public on the 60-inch 1942 Sperry searchlight.



During the day, the mess section kept everyone fed. Below, SSG Weaver and PVT Meiselman stand in line for noon chow. CPL Turner serves PVT Meiselman and SSG Grant oversees the cooking on the stoves.





On Saturday night, the WWII Weekend features a “Hanger Dance,” with a ‘big-band’ playing all the top hits of the 1940’s. Fort Mott State Park’s 60-inch, 800,000,000-candle power searchlight was in action during the hanger dance, and as you can see by the beam, penetrates the night sky with ease.



As this searchlight is quite literally  $\frac{1}{3}$ <sup>rd</sup> of the intensity of the sun, and is brighter than most anything else on earth, many people came over to visit and learn more about the light throughout the evening. Below, visitors prepare to discuss the searchlight with 1LT Grant.





Here is another view of the light beam, taken from directly behind the searchlight itself. The effective range on these lights, employed for both anti-shipping and anti-aircraft operations, is over five miles.



The brightness of the light is readily apparent in this photo. Also apparent is the nature of how the light works – the burning of Carbon rods. The flame, produced by the introduction of electricity into the rod itself, and the light of which is then sent outward by a 60-inch wide parabolic mirror, can be seen burning brightly in the center.





60" Coast Artillery searchlights are extremely substantial pieces of equipment. Comparing the two photos below, one can see the extreme level of heat given off in use. The first photo shows the searchlight with the power turned off and using a camera's flash to take the picture in the darkness.



This second photo was taken without a flash. Note the bright red glow in the center of the searchlight on the carbon rod holder, heat shield and electrical assembly – it is being given off entirely by residual heat.





In addition to the operation of the searchlight, several of AGFA's members attended the hanger dance on Friday and Saturday evenings. Below, CPL Minton prepares his OD Wool Class-A uniform for the dance.



Below, CPL Minton and PVT Rosamilia are just arriving at the hanger dance.





Reenactors and living historians, representing many different organizations, nationalities and armies, attended the dance. Below, British and Canadian troops are shown alongside with US Army personnel and a U.S. Marine veteran. Many veterans of WWII attend the dance in their original Class-A dress uniforms and rub elbows with the young men and women who traveled from across the country to honor their service and sacrifice. .



Below, a group of paratroopers and their ladies stand beside a jeep before hitting the dance floor.





Many people jammed onto the dance floor as the band played 1940's period music. All nationalities and armies were represented; include German Japanese and Italian forces.



With space inside the hanger becoming as hard of a commodity to get as a new set of tires in 1943, folks moved outside and started dancing on the apron. In the photo below, one can see that not all men were in period uniform, and that some were in period civilian attire as well.





On Sunday, 6 June, the 66<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Allied Landings on the Shores of France at Normandy, the members of 21<sup>st</sup> Coast Artillery were dressed in 1<sup>st</sup> Pattern Herringbone Twill (HBT) and blue denim uniforms. Below, SSG Weaver and 2LT Still stand next to the entrance sign.



CPL Turner and SSG Grant prepare another outstanding breakfast for the unit.





The photo below was taken Sunday morning in front of the search light and showed the organization in true work and combat uniforms – HBTs and Blue Denim.



Sunday was a very busy day. Below 2LT Still provides orientation and instruction to the public in the use of the M1910A1 Seacoast Artillery Azimuth Instrument.





Many very unique and one of a kind aircraft were present at Reading, and nearly all flew during the air show. Below, a British Royal Air Force Avro Lancaster 4-engined heavy bomber prepares for take off. It is one of only two such surviving models of this aircraft in flying condition anywhere in the world.. This one is from Canada, a part of the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in Ontario. The other is in flying Lancaster is in Great Britain.



After a brief rain that dampened tents and uniforms but not spirits, the B-25 "Panchito" warms up on the taxiway, directly behind AGFA's bivouac area.





There were two Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses at Reading this year. Below is the B-17F that was used in the 1990 movie "Memphis Belle".



This photo provides a great view of the nose of the "Memphis Belle". The real "Memphis Belle," the first American bomber to complete 25 missions over enemy territory and survive – a harrowing task without fighter escorts – survives to this day, and is currently undergoing an extensive multi-year restoration project at the US Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, OH.





The other B-17 was a crowd favorite, the B-17G "Yankee Lady." She returns to the show year after year to the delight of the visitors.



There were many fighter aircraft present as well. Below is one of four North American P-51 Mustangs.





In April 2009, Bob Barranascas, a well respected member of the vintage aircraft community and co-founder of “Warbirds Over Long Island” was tragically killed when his P-40N Warhawk went down in the waters off of Long Island, NY. As a result of this tragic accident, there were no P-40’s at Reading in 2009. However, for 2010, a Curtis P-40E was present and is pictured below.



Another classic fighter that graced the show was the Republic P-47D Thunderbolt pictured below.





Sunday afternoon began the sad chore of cleaning up and loading out after the event. It was time to head home and part company with many friends that AGFA won't get to see for another 12 months. In the photo below, PVT Turner, Jr. and PVT Rosamilia stack rifles and ordnance in preparation for the final load out.



Below CPL Turner, PVT Morrill, PFC Saunders and CPL Minton fold a tent up for transportation.





In one of our final loading actions, SGT Turner, with HHB 21<sup>st</sup> Coast Artillery Gideon waving proudly, drives the '44 Jeep, towing the searchlight generator (with CPL Minton riding on the back) to the transport trailer.



This marked the end of another successful Ft. Mott and Army Ground Forces Association event at Reading, and we are already anticipating our return on 3 June 2011.

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