

Trains and Troops Strasburg, PA

On 5-6 November 2011, the Army Ground Forces Association (AGFA), supported the Pennsylvania Railroad Museum and the Strasburg Railroad during the annual "Trains and Troops" event. This unique event chronicles the use of railroads throughout American military history from the Civil War to today,

The members of AGFA that participated in the event were Andy Grant, Doug and Lynda Houck, Kathleen Kluxen, Anne Lutkenhouse, Tom Minton, Deanna Schafer, Kyle Schafer, Vincent Turner, Vincent Turner, Jr., Gary Weaver, and Shawn Welch. The educational objective was to provide interpretation of the oft-forgotten and overlooked mission of the U.S. Army's Coast Artillery mobile railway guns and medical support during the World War Two era as well as the U.S. Army in the Korean War period.

The photo below shows the participating membership on Saturday 5 November in front of a restored Pennsylvania RR boxcar. The museum features dozens of excellently preserved locomotives and rolling stock within its main building. Interpreters for the Trains and Troops event set up shop in the museum proper, and use the rail cars and engines as a historic back drop.



To officially open the event, an honor guard posted the American Flag and the State Flag of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. They are seen here, prior to the start of the ceremony.



AGFA maintained three distinct displays, all in close proximity to one another. Here, PVT Turner, CPT Grant and CPL Turner confer next to the Coast Artillery layout. The unit being portrayed by AGFA at this event was the 52nd Coast Artillery regiment, which was stationed at Ft. Hancock, NJ with 8" railway guns, and 12" railway mortars. Various Coast Artillery items, including a pair of operational EE-91 Telephones, an M1910A1 Azimuth telescope, 6" High-Explosive Shell, fuses, and other items were on display for the public.



To the right of the Coast Artillery display was 2LT Lutkenhouse's medical display, which consisted of vintage WWII-era US Army Hospital and Nurse Corps items. And, rounding out the AGFA area was SSG Houck's Korean War Infantry display. Both are seen here, with SSG Houck's table hidden by visitors.



It is seen here, in the photo below, as SSG Houck and 2LT Lutkenhouse confer in front of SSG Houck's display table.



Below 2LT Lutkenhouse discusses medical tools and techniques from WWII with visitors.



In another view, 2LT Lutkenhouse continues to discuss medical items with a visitor as SSG Houck stands by his Korean war display. Members Miss Kathleen Kluxen and CPL Minton are also pictured.



Below SSG Houck explains items used in the Korean War, as CPL Minton and Miss Kluxen share a cup of coffee. The building was unheated at the time, and it was quite chilly. A new "geo-thermal" heating system was currently under installation, and should be completed soon.



A broader view of the exhibit area, taken from an observation bridge that runs across the width of the museum, is shown below.



Directly across the street is the Strasburg Railroad. Although separate entities, these two organizations operate in coordination with each other during the Trains and Troops weekends. During the Troops and Trains event, the Strasburg Railroad operates a fully-operational passenger train comprised of vintage cars and a steam locomotive. The Strasburg Railroad encourages the reenactors from Trains and Troops to board and ride with the visiting public, effectively turning the already historical atmosphere into a true "Troop Train." As always, this was warmly received by the public, who were invited to talk to the historians and ask about their individual units or impressions.



Boarding the train was filled with excitement, as to add realism to the event for the public; the Military Police (MP) inspected the participant passengers for proper paperwork and clearance. Military Police were a constant presence around rail stations, ensuring that all troops passing through had proper paper work, indicating that they were on leave or on a pass, ensuring that no service personnel were trying to go "AWOL," ie, "Absent Without Leave," a very serious offense in the military, even today.



To drive the point home, the MP's are seen here, having just questioned this young U.S. Army T-5 Specialist and are now in the process of detaining him... Uh oh.



...And then they promptly hauled him off.



During the event, the Strasburg Railroad provided free tickets to participants (living historians and reenactors) to ride the trains and interpret for the public. Below LTC Welch, 2LT Lutkenhouse, Miss Kluxen and CPL Minton prepare to find their seats on the train.



Below LTC Welch speaks with a Military Police interpreter who is armed with an M1903 Springfield rifle.



Below is the view inside the “club car” showing the seats, bar area and the beautiful ornamental stained glass.



Though not as ornate, the regular passenger cars were still quite nice. The wooden features and lighting were very beautiful and added greatly to the charm of the cars.



Unlike today's modern trains, there was no special form of heating all the passenger cars. Instead, each car was issued with its very own coal stove. And, in true fashion, each stove on the train has been restored to working condition. Each was stoked perfectly, adding a comfortable level of warmth on this chilly fall day.



The Strasburg Railroad operates on its own track. During the ride, when the train reaches the end of the line, a switch needs to be made. The engine will pass the train on a side rail, towards the other end to pull the train back into the yard head-on. This photo was taken from track level, just before the engineer performed the disconnection. The size of the engine is quite evident here.



This switching of the locomotive is eagerly awaited by all enthusiasts and the cameras come out to get that special picture of a steam locomotive in action.



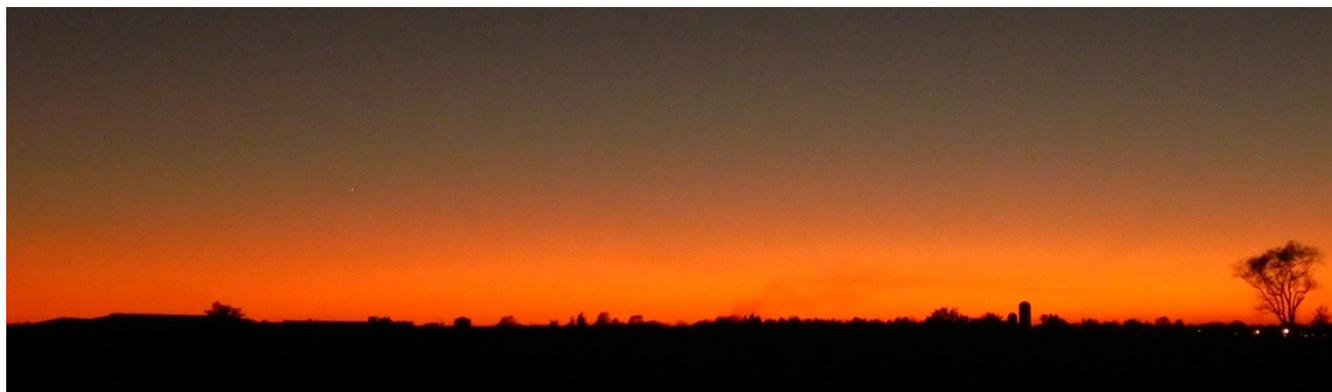
As the locomotive rumbled by, the coal smoke wafted over the top of the train, and was illuminated in the late afternoon sun. Living historians prize moment such as these, which are minute modern day snapshots into a by-gone era when steam locomotives were widely used and America was heavily dependent on its rail networks.



Back at the station, Miss. Kluxen poses with the locomotive, Serial No, 57812, produced by the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia, PA in 1924. As nearly every able-bodied man in the nation answered the call to arms during WWII, previously male-dominated occupations, including locomotive engineers, would be filled by women to support the war effort. Such a photo of a female engineer would have been non-existent prior to December 1941, but by late 1942, was quite commonplace.



As the day wound to a close, AGFA members closed up shop and headed out to get cleaned up and into Class A uniforms in preparation of the 40's era swing dance to be hosted at the museum later that evening. Some members headed home, but other AGFA members from out of state returned to the adjacent Red Caboose Motel. We were treated to a wonderful sunset as we prepared to return later that evening. The two respective rail museums are silhouetted on the left side of the photo.



The close proximity of the motel to the museums is quite evident in this photo, and we were able to get an early jump each morning with such close distance.



Early Sunday, those of us staying at the Red Caboose opted to enjoy breakfast in an original railway dining car, which was a welcome treat.



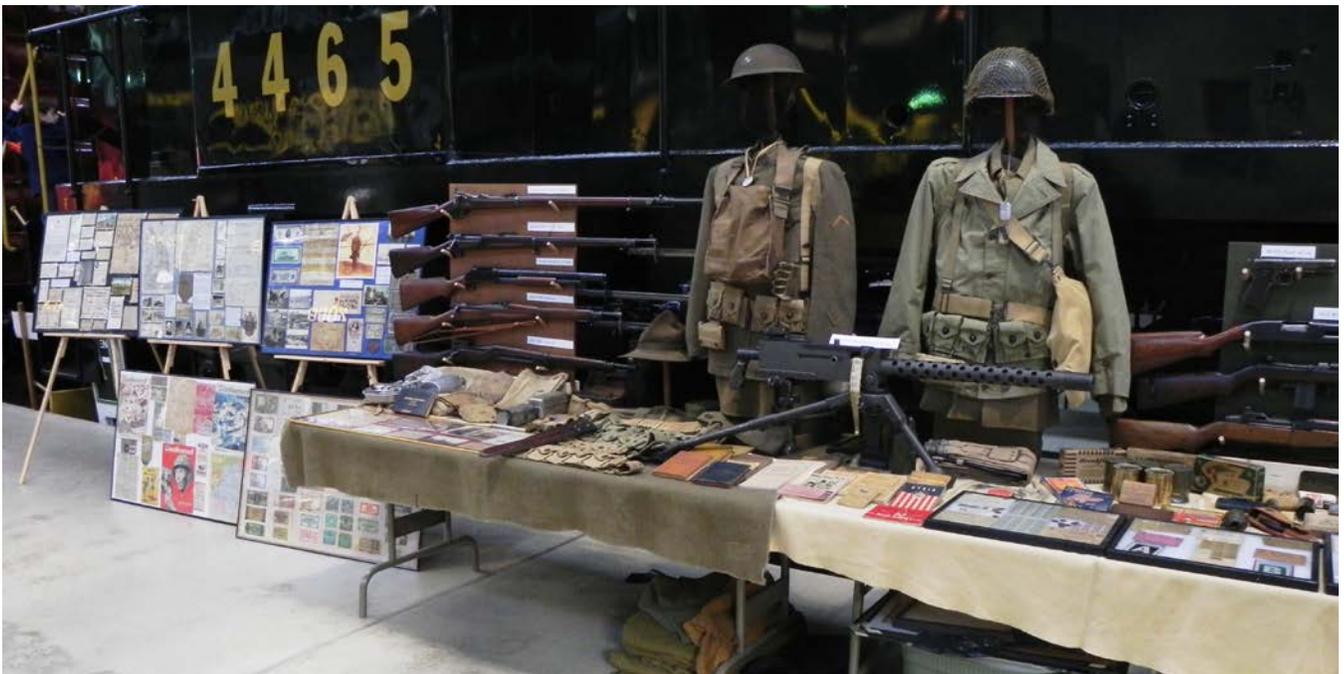
Below the membership takes a moment for a group snapshot on Sunday.



Many other individuals, collectors and groups supported the event. Below is an outstanding example of a combat-ready Harley Davidson motorcycle, complete with M1928 Tommy gun and shovel.



These two displays chronicled both World Wars I and II...



Other displays also covered the Vietnam War...



... and through to the first Gulf War.



CPL Turner, seen here, had a unique portrayal within the AGFA display. In reflecting that this was a time-line event, he was portraying a member of a U.S. Army Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA) unit that was emplaced around Washington DC in the early 1950's. The uniform he wears is a post-WWII Army uniform, still made of wool, and with the WWII-era "Ike Jacket," but he is also wearing high top brown leather boots, indicative of the post-war era.



CPL Turner was not the only AGFA member to sport a distinctive uniform for this event. Here we see CPT Grant at the AGFA display area within the museum. With his Coast Artillery Class-A uniform, he also wears the distinctive high-top brown leather boots and the Jump Wings of an Army Paratrooper. CPT Grant, a member of AGFA's Board of Directors, recently completed Jump School with the WWII Airborne Demonstration Team located in Frederick, OK. This unique group of historians takes living history to a whole new level, jumping from WWII-vintage C-47 transport planes for veteran events and air shows worldwide. (<http://www.wwiadt.org>)



The train car exhibits within the museum were also quite impressive. Of special interest were the sleeping and dining cars, reserved for long distance travel. These cars were built, operated and maintained by the Pullman Company for over 50 years. Their standard of service was the benchmark by which all other such contractors were judged.



Below is a photo of the interior of a dining car.



Here, AGFA members take a moment to talk to one of our WWII Veterans who attended the event. We never miss a chance to talk to – and thank – our veterans, regardless of the era in which they served.



As there were also several home-front displays, AGFA members, all Coast Artillery troops at heart, thoroughly enjoyed seeing this vintage advertisement for preserving waste fats for explosive compound production. The gun used by the artist is, in fact, a 12" M1895 Gun on the WWI-era M1917 long-range barbette carriage. These guns were placed around American harbors during the latter stages of WWI into the 1920's, giving the Coast Artillery an increased edge in firepower and accuracy.



Below, SSG Houck (AGFA event organizer for Trains and Troops) and Lynda Houck, standing next to SSG Houck's Korean War table, reflect upon the success and enjoyment of the event and are looking forward to the next "Trains and Troops" event in 2012!



As the event ends and displays are taken down and packed, 2LT Lutkenhouse, Mrs. Houck, SSG Weaver and Miss Schafer confer on the activities of the day.



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