

Coast Artillery Living History Ft. Hancock, NJ

On 17-18 May 2008, 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 educational objective was to provide interpretation of the Coast Artillery mission at Fort Hancock in the World War Two era.

The members of AGFA participating were Mike Murray, Doug Houck, Jonathan Prostack, Gary Weaver, Shawn Welch, Tom Minton, Anne Lutkenhouse and Larry Winchell. Interpretation, including uniforms and equipment, was designed to present a view of the Coast Artillery at Fort Hancock in May of 1943. 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 Number 1 at Fort Hancock and the role that Battery Peck/Gunnison played as Advance HECP #1's Examination Battery. Maintenance of the M1900 6-inch guns was a major activity on Saturday.

The formation in the photo below included LTC Welch, 1st SGT Murray, PVT Gutch 1225th Army Service Unit, 2nd Service Command, CPL Minton, CPL Winchell, 2nd LT Lutkenhouse (1225th ASU, 2nd Service Command, station hospital) and SSG Houck.



The first major task for the event was to check, clean and grease the breach block for the #2 M1900 6-inch gun. This task took approximately 90 minutes from start to finish. A primary objective was to determine whether there was any rust within the block since its internal components were last inspected in May 2007. Liberal use of cosmoline proved to be effective – only very minor rust was found within the block and it was dealt with swiftly. The lead for the effort was SSG Houck, shown here with 2LT Lutkenhouse.



Installation of the breechblock went quickly – it was completed in less than thirty minutes. In the photo below, 1st Sgt Murray prepares the obturator spindle for assembly by applying cosmoline to the threads for the obturator nut. SSG Houck is applying cosmoline to the face of the breech block.



Over the winter, several major projects had been undertaken at the battery. These were showcased for the public during Coastal Defenses Day. One of the projects was the installation of an original Crouse and Hinds explosion proof electric control box plotting room. The rehabilitation and installation of this box showcased the skills of CPT Prostak. This is the same type of electric control box that was originally installed in the 1943 upgrade of Battery Gunnison. It now controls the lights and receptacles within the plotting room.



Another project from the winter months was relocation of the telephone terminal boxes and switchboard assemblies to the proper location in the plotting room. The new orientation is shown in the photograph below. This required a major relocation of all major telephone lines both inside the plotting room and those lines that were entering the plotting room from the two terminal boxes for the two gun platforms. This took two weekends to complete and makes the telephone installation historically correct as installed in 1943.



A major task completed by the National Park Service was the installation of heavy wood and metal framed doors to close the ammunition hoist sheds. CPL Minton is shown cleaning dirt and debris from the area around the ammunition station. These new doors are critical to maintaining the integrity of the ammunition service and to secure the magazines.



The Army Ground Forces Association is teaming with the Sandy Hook Foundation (SHF) and National Park Service (NPS) to rehabilitate Battery McCook/Reynolds. This 12-inch mortar battery was the first of its type built in the United States. The project is estimated to cost over \$1 million. It will be funded by donations to the Sandy Hook Foundation. No taxpayer dollars will be used! Seen below are participants in a project meeting. They include from front to back and left to right 1st Sgt Murray, Dave Hoder (SHF), Brad Jenkinson (Cannons On-line, Inc), Forrest Taylor (Cannons On-Line, Inc), Betsy Barrett (SHF), Lou Venuto (NPS) and LTC Welch.



Saturday evening AGFA personnel ate dinner at the battery in preparation for a night tour in support of the National Park Service. CPL Minton, who is also a National Park Service Ranger, coordinated the tour. The tour was crafted as a special "Commander's invitation tour of secured fortifications" that was actively defending NY Harbor. Specifically, this tour went to the joint Army/Navy Advance Harbor Entrance Control Post Number 1 on top of Battery Potter, and to Battery Gunnison, the Examination Battery for HECF # 1. In the photo below 1st Sgt Murray, 2LT Lutkenhouse, SSG Houck and CPL Minton assemble "security passes" for visitors. These passes were issued to public participants and allowed them "access" to secure fortifications such as Battery Gunnison. Visitors were allowed to keep the passes as a memento of the event.



The culminating event of the tour was Battery Gunnison. In the photo below, 1st Sgt Murray educates the public about ammunition storage and maintenance in a battery on alert 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



On Sunday, the battery was alive with public visitors. In the photo below, LTC Welch and CPL Minton lead the public through loading drills on the M1900 6-inch gun #2. These drills were conducted each time a public gathering of more than five people was present on the gun platform. This proved to be very popular.



The plotting room was also busy. CPL Winchell and CPT Prostek provided instruction to members of the public as they toured the battery. In the photo below, CPL Winchell explains the functioning of the plotting board to a Cub Scout Pack.



The newest member of AGFA, 2LT Lutkenhouse, provided the most interesting of all our interpretations. As a medical professional, 2LT Lutkenhouse provides an authentic interpretation of a nurse stationed at Fort Hancock in the 1943 time period. Her display of vintage medical equipment added a medical aspect to the life of the Coast Artillery soldier. In the photo below, 2LT Lutkenhouse explains various vintage medical items to visitors.



The photo below shows the group during the closing minutes of the event on Sunday afternoon. From left to right behind the plotting board is LTC Welch, CPL Minton, SSG Weaver, CPT Prostack, CPL Winchell, 1st Sgt Murray, Recruit Meiselman and 2LT Lutkenhouse.



This event was our first chance to showcase many of our completed restoration projects from our winter work weekends. Additional projects will be undertaken during July and September work weekends, and 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>