Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS,
An Oral History Interview with Fred Schneider
245th Coast Artillery, Battery F.
1940-45
With Tom Hoffman and Elaine Harmon, NPS
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Staff Sergeant. and Mrs. Fred Schneider at Fort Hancock

Mrs. Schneider showing off her refrigerator at Quarters 29B

Staff Sergeant Schneider's Children on front steps of Quarters 29B on Sergeants' Row


Mrs. Schneider in living room of Quarters 29B.

Photos courtesy of NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ( )

(First section is a self recorded interview. The second section is a public tour at Fort Hancock with Tom Hoffman and Fred Schneider.)

My name is Fred Schneider and I served at Sandy Hook in the period from 1940 until 1945 as a Staff Sergeant with F of the 245th.

I had previously recorded on tape some of my recollections and had provided to the National Park Service. I was very pleased today to receive a letter acknowledging the receipt of those tapes and the appreciation for them. And Elaine Harmon as well as Tom Hoffman, the historians at Sandy Hook, have requested that perhaps I might respond to some of their direct questions and perhaps feed them some information that they can compile the typical G.I. of those days and the things that were involved on a daily basis.

In that first year, 1940, we had received a great deal of enlistees that had joined the service on a one-year enlistment and I guess for that entire year prior to the War, our assignment was training, drilling, training at the gun sites, marching, and all the various categories. At that time there were very few weapons that were provided to the organizations that were in the states. We were even practicing with pieces of wood on ratchets that would simulate a machine gun as well as using some flatbed trucks to simulate tanks. At that time, we were all using the 1903 Springfield rifle. I guess at that time I was carrying a .45 automatic. Some of the officers were carrying .45 revolvers. At a later date, the first three graders and the officers were assigned carbine rifles instead of the side arms that they were carrying previously.

Early in 1941, we lost a great deal of the personnel from our tactical outfits. I guess in that period of time prior to the War, up to and leading to the War, we lost about 85% of the personnel who were on various assignments. A number of people went into the O.C.S. (Officer Candidate School) and became officers and served with distinction all over the world as well as a number of fellas that had formed the cadres that were formed. And these fellas performed on merchant ships as gun crews on 6-inch guns on these merchant vessels that were in convoy going to Europe as well as a number of men were put into cadres. And some of them, in fact a great deal of them, went to the British West Indies, to Antigua specifically. We know that a great deal of our fellows had wound up (there).

So as far as we were concerned, the 15% or so that remained here, our assignments were in teaching the one year fellas that had volunteered as well as. In January of ’41, we started to receive the draftees or trainees that came in from the various parts of the country. Here again, it was our job to try to form a cohesive force in the event that it was necessary for us to fire these rifles.

We were assigned to Kingman and Mills which had the 12-inch barbette rifles. As far as these rifles were concerned, they were out in the open. There were two guns at Kingman and Mills. They were separated by about 2,000 feet apart. And as far as these rifles were concerned, they found that in Europe they had some difficulty I guess with the Maginot line where they found that some of these guns could be turned onto Paris, onto the French cities. Well, here again, the same thing here. These guns had a 360 degree traverse that if, in the event that the enemy might come into a place like Sandy Hook and capture these guns, they could be fired into New York City and into metropolitan Jersey, Jersey City, Newark and so forth. It was within the range of these rifles.

It was determined that the only thing to do would be to casemate these guns, which meant that the barrel of the gun would face out toward the Atlantic Ocean and have maybe a 45 or 50 degree radius so that it would only fire out into the ocean area where boats might approach. And it necessitated putting tons and tons of concrete, like a mushroom, over the top of the guns with tons and tons of sand and with actually with armor piercing qualities I guess on the, or anti-piercing qualities in the concrete which were meshed with steel which, boy, it was a real hard substance.

Some of us fellas were quite fortunate. We had our automobiles on the Post and of course at that time, with the pay that we received and the cost of gasoline, it was quite difficult to fill-up on a regular basis. So being the devilish guys that we were, we would always look for some means of getting some Sunday requisitions to provide us with some gasoline. I can recall one incident that when they were casemating the guns, we had these huge, huge trucks. They were so large that you could almost walk under the chassis of them. They were just so tremendous with huge wheels, huge tires, and huge capacity for the sand and cement that they were carrying. And on this one occasion we decided that we would like to go for a little ride in the car but, where were we going to get gasoline? Somebody suggested that perhaps we could siphon some of the gasoline out of one of those huge trucks. Well, because of the angle of the fill valve on the truck, it was kind of difficult for us because we only had a straight pipe. So, whoever it was, had the idea of, "Gee, let's look underneath and see if there was some way of tapping it directly from the gas tank." Well, sure enough, there was a gas line running from the gas tank toward the carburetor in the front of the truck and right in line was a shut off valve. Well, at one of the flare fittings we disconnected it and we were able to take one gallon or two gallons, whatever it was. But in the process we just about drained most the gasoline, I guess, from the truck. Well, here again, while we were trying to replace the flare fitting, we must have cross threaded it and the gasoline was leaking and we were a little concerned that it might be a hazard. So what we did is, we said, "Well gee, there's a shut off valve on the line, if we shut that off at least it won't cause any kind of a problem or hazard or some kind of a flammable situation that might develop if somebody were to throw a match." Well, we proceeded. We shut the thing off and I guess we wound up having a good time taking a ride.

Well, the next morning the engineers came there and were all set to go to work. And I guess the tractor driver got up there and attempted to start this huge truck and the motor was turning over but it just didn't seem to get gas. Boy, they had a heck of a time. They just didn't know what to do. So we watched for a whole half hour or so and it kind of bothered me to think that, gee, they couldn't do their work. And they were kind of disgusted and frustrated and I went up there and I said to them, as if I was a wonderful, wonderful expert mechanic, "It sounds to me that its not getting gas to the carburetor." And of course, you know, their feeling was, "Who the devil was this guy?" They listened to me and I said, "Well, gee, why don't we try to trace the gas line "And sure enough we did. And I got under the truck and I looked and I said, "Well, gee, shouldn't this valve be facing in the direction of the line? It seems to be that this valve is off." Well, sure enough, after we turned the thing I didn't tell about was that they had put on a huge bulldozer on the front of this thing and they put a chain on it and they were pulling this

thing all around the hill, back and forth and up and down and it just wouldn't start. Well, after I pointed out about the shut off valve and they determined that sure enough that was what happened. But they were just puzzled about how this possibly could happen. When they turned it on, they saw that the fitting was leaking a little bit and they said that, "Gee someone must have discovered that it was leaking and didn't bother fixing it." So, they just went ahead and fixed the flare fitting and they turned the valve on and they got that truck within seconds the thing started up and boy it was purring beautifully. Well, I tell you, if you were ever ashamed of yourself, these fellas came to me and thanked me and they said they were grateful and if there was anything they could do for me. Of course, I couldn't very well tell them who the culprits were but I'm glad. We were happy and they were happy.

Another situation that developed too in reference to gas was that there were some civilian employees that when they were casemating the guns, these civilian employees, it was their job to come down in the evening and run some pumps. They would put the pumps down in the pit of the gun to make sure that there was no water down there. During that construction period it had to be absolutely dry for the work that they were performing. Well, this fellow left a five gallon can of gasoline and me and a couple of my cohorts, we felt well, here was another means of having a free ride. So we went and we filled the car up with gas. Well, I guess we were kind of hungry and selfish so it filled the gas tank to capacity. We still had one or two gallons left, so we put it in a two-gallon can and put it in the back of the car.

Well, just as we were going to leave that afternoon and return to the barracks for our dinner, one of the civilian employees came in with his personal car. And he got there and he was all set to start the pumps and he realized that his gasoline was gone. And I tell ya, the guy was so upset because number 1 he didn't have any gasoline for his automobile to go out to town to buy some. And secondly, he would be fired for not taking precautions and making sure that the gasoline was stored properly, that nobody could pilfer it. And, well, he was so concerned about his job and he wanted to perform his job properly. So here again, I guess we had a certain degree of conscience and we very gallantly told him we could supply him with this 2-gallon can of gas if he would like it. I tell ya, here again, we were completely ashamed of ourselves because the fella came to us and thanked us and he practically kissed our feet because he was just so ecstatic over it and he said that anything that he could possibly do for us, don't hesitate to call on him because we were his friends for life.

During the same period of time, we had a supply sergeant named Henry Backner. And I'll tell ya, this guy was one of the best barter agents that you could possibly ever have. He could barter one thing for another and he could swap things and get something in place of it. And in fact, at our mess hall, we had a condition outside that there was all gravel and dirt and we were always getting in trouble with the sanitation officer because the cans were placed on the dirt and you would have to rake it up and make sure that it was a real clean area. So, we had a first sergeant at that time, Joe De Filipo and he was great. Joe De Filipo was an artist in about everything he would do. He had so many talents. This fellow, he could sew. He could knit. He could do carpentry work. He

could cook. He was a philosopher. He was a psychologist. He was just about everything you could possibly want in a person. He could do artwork. He could do the roughest masonry jobs that you could possibly think of. And it was his suggestion, that perhaps, we could make an elevated platform of concrete and place the cans on it. And this way they would be in a real sanitary condition. Perhaps we could get good brownie points from the sanitation section of the Health Department of the Army.

What he did was, he requested from this Henry Backner who was our supply sergeant, to try to negotiate with the engineers at the site where they were casemating the guns and see if he could manipulate, make some deals, to get some concrete. Well, sure enough, Henry went there. There were some real cold days up there. Henry was able to negotiate and barter that he could provide them with some warm clothing, parkas and so forth. They made a deal that they provided a load of concrete. Our first sergeant and a couple of fellas they set up the forms and well, right up near Potter, that's where our barracks were. We had one of the best-constructed garbage platforms that you could possible have. And that thing, don't forget, had the reinforced concrete. I don't know how they ever knocked it down when they knocked that barracks down. We got some real good brownie points. The engineers were happy. It was a real good set up.

It was requested that perhaps I could recall a typical day in the service. But of course, it must be understood that a typical day changed a great deal in those five years. In the early beginning, as I stated before, a typical day was one where we were more or less keepers of these recruits that didn't have too much service. A typical day was arising at 6:30 in the morning and assembling outside and having a roll call and then we would have our breakfast. We would have about 20-25 minutes after our breakfast to prepare to get out and have our activity out in the field. Whether we were doing drills out there or whether we were going to the guns and working on the guns. And of course, later on, when it was the war period, our assignment was somewhat different. It was necessary for us to spend most of our time at the guns. In fact, immediately after the War, even though we had barracks, it was necessary for us to live down at Kingman and Mills. As I recall, it was about once a week that you would get back to the barracks and be able to sleep in your own bed and shower and shave and relax. But the rest of the time, and here again, I don't recall the length of time we did this, but we were actually sleeping in the interior portion of the Kingman and Mills. At night we would place folding cots down in the passageways and we would in the morning, pick up the cots and stack them. That's the way we lived.

In fact, the first Christmas after the War, I guess that must have been December of '41, we were kind of down in the dumps because we spent the entire Christmas holidays at Kingman and Mills. Somebody scrubbed up an evergreen tree and had a couple of symbolic balls and lights and so forth on the tree. And it was just kind of I guess, discouraging was the word that would be most fitting. We were down there and we would attempt to sing some carols. I guess about the best activity was that inside the boiler room we had a number of fellows that came from the Midwest, the Dakotas, the Minnesotas. We had some fellas from the Tennessees. These fellas, well, we went to the boiler room because it was very warm and you could have lights exposed in there. Some

of the fellas would play cards. Some of these fellas would play the banjo and sing some of the typical mountain music. I remember one fella there. He had all these parodies. I guess they were some off color songs but it seemed to cheer us up at least a little bit.

You know I recall an awful lot of individuals and I can remember some of their particular traits. It really brings back fond memories. I guess the one that I think of a great deal, and I'm very fortunate to see him at least once a year and I had the good fortune of being raised in the same neighborhood and going to elementary school and to high school together and to service together, was Willie and Henry Tuting. Now Henry Tuting got out in the very early part of the 1940 period. And Willie Tuting more or less, took his place. He had been in the National Guard with us for years too. But Willie Tuting was a real dedicated gun commander. As far as Willie was concerned, when he did his job he did it properly. He was really interested in his job. Away from the job, I guess he was very much like us. Took things lightly and just enjoyed everything, every minute we were there and did the best that he possibly could. That was Willie.

Another individual was Tom Piccolo. Tom Piccolo was in charge of the machinery that operated the guns and the power plant inside of Kingman and Mills. He again was a real meticulous individual. He took care of those fabulously. He had them well painted and he took care of it just as if it was his own property. Tom Piccolo, I last saw I guess a year ago and since has moved to Florida. He spent many years I think with Republic Aircraft or Grumman, one of those. He has now retired.

I remember some of the very funny incidents with him. He had little Willie's automobile. That at the time was a very small car. He had some difficulties with the engine. He was out one night with a couple of fellas down in the Highlands. I guess they must have had a couple of brews because I don't think they would have done it if they were completely sober. He saw a car that was very similar to his on the street. And as I recall the story, and I'm pretty sure it's true because I more or less did confirm it with him at one time. What they did is, he was actually a good mechanic and I guess within an hour or so they removed the engine from his car and took the one from the other car and replaced the engines in the two automobiles. And he drove away, well, I don't recall if they completed hooking up the other car, which I doubt but that was quite a story up there. As I recall, that car worked for a long time afterward.

This same Piccolo, was in charge of a pyramidal tent, and a group of fellas that were at guard at the Highlands at a cable hut. Now, as I remember the significance of a cable hut was that it did provide some kind of power. Whether it was communication or light and power I'm not quite sure. But they were stationed at this cable hut which is only about 600 feet I guess south of Bahrs Restaurant right down at the River. And they spent several months down at that location. And evidently they did a good job because there was never any problem that developed at that point.

Another duty that we performed that was a little bit extra curricular that wasn't related directly to our company itself. On a regular rotation basis, we used to be assigned to a tower in Deal, (New Jersey) which is probably two towns south of Sandy Hook. At that

time, the Coast Guard Station was located right there, and we would put a 24-hour guard at that tower. And we would have a pyramidal tent that we stayed in at the base of the tower. And as I recall, the tower was somewhere about 75 foot high with a vertical metal ladder that you went hand-over-hand to climb up into this probably 12, or 14 by 14 (foot) station perched atop this tower. And it was our duty to man the telescopic instruments up in the tower itself and our duty was to scan the sea directly out in front of Deal, which I said is several miles south of Sandy Hook, and observe anything that seemed to be unusual out there in the waters.

Well, of course, most of us up there never really saw anything of any consequence, however, we had to report every hour on the hour. I guess it was to the Second Naval Command and the Second Naval District, or whatever it was, and then the Harbor Defense Command. One was on the hour and the other was on the half hour. So a report was going into the authorities every half hour reporting any eventful or uneventful situations that developed.

Well, as the story went we had one gentleman that was a company clerk. There wasn't really too much regard for his soldiering ability because that's the reason he was company clerk. He just didn't care for the military aspect of it. Getting out and drilling and partaking in the guns and so forth but he had to participate in this guard duty that we had on this observation tower at times. And as I say, to my recollection was that suddenly we were called out one evening on an alert. We all had to man the beaches. We had assigned positions on the beaches in case there were some sort of invasion at the beach and we had to take up pre-determined positions. We were out there for several hours this one cold night. The alert was called off. And then of course, the word got out that this gentleman had reported to the authorities that he had seen the silhouette of a submarine out there in the waters this evening. Here again, when we returned, we just badgered him. We made him feel I guess as low as a toad. We were just condemning him for putting us all through this business of having to get out on the beach in this cold weather.

Well as I recall, several months later, he did receive a commendation, that due to his alertness, and his observation, and the fact that and I don't know exactly how it was spelled out but the indication was that because of his alertness and dedication, that there was an enemy vessel and I'm not sure of the wording but it was disposed of. It more or less indicated that the problem was no longer there after he made his report.

I recall an individual whose name was Maze, M-A-Z-E. This fella here was a cook in our mess hall. It seemed that in civilian life, he had worked in some of the finer restaurants in New York City and in the general New York area. He was quite adept at preparing pastries. Well, he was, as most cooks are just as people that are involved in art, they are very temperamental. He was that way too. And if anybody told him to do something, he would rebel. So we found that by using a little psychology, we would tell this fella that we would recall a particular thing that he made, whether it was cookies or whether it was pies or whatever it might be, we would tell him that we were thrilled and how wonderful everybody thought they were and how everybody enjoyed it. We'd get him, actually

we'd get his ego to take over and next thing you know you would see the lights burning in the mess hall all night long and he would prepare some delicacies of some sort. It was really great.

(End self recorded interview. Begin public tour with Tom Hoffman, Fred Schneider and Elaine Harmon.)

TH: I would like to welcome you all to Sandy Hook, which is part of a National Recreation Area taken care of by the National Park Service. It's called Gateway National Recreation Area. It was founded by act of Congress late in 1972 and includes old Army areas such as Fort Hancock here which was in operation well into 1974. But that was the phase out period when the U.S. Army started to close up a lot of the buildings that you see around us here. And Fort Hancock includes this housing area. This includes where the officers and enlisted personnel lived here. This was more or less the Fort Hancock village or Post area. And the Army was here for a reason for many, many years. It was to defend New York Harbor first, from warship attack. Just in case we had attack from the sea.

You would have a garrison of soldiers here, who living in this area here, of course, would go over to the concrete gun batteries which, almost all of them, front the ocean and would blast the enemy out of the sea, if it had happened. We're very fortunate that it did not happen here. But after World War II things changed and the threat came more from airplanes and missiles years later. And in the 1950's, 1960's, right up into 1974, the Army had an air defense system here with the Nike missile, which was a ground to air missile that could be launched off from a place here at Sandy Hook, and go far out over the ocean and intercept and destroy enemy bombers or fighters way out over the ocean, before they got to the metropolitan area.

Today we have a special guest, Mr. Fred Schneider, who was here during perhaps, Fort Hancock's most important period, World War II. It was a global war and although there were a lot of battlefields over in Europe, and in Asia, the front line was right off the American coast too. We might not have had enemy warships like battleships and cruisers coming over and invading us with surface ships, but we did have the enemy coming over, and they were under the water. They were in submarines. So, most of the warfare took place far from here, and yet the enemy was very close at hand too, in World War II.

Because Mr. Schneider is pretty familiar with what happened here in the War years, I'd like to every now and then interject things and let him take over. And one thing, what is now is the Sandy Hook Museum, for many, many years here, when this was Fort Hancock, this was the Guardhouse. This was the place for the naughty soldiers. I would like Fred to tell you a little bit about what happened here, when he was here.

FS: Well, at the time, I came here in 1940. That was a full year before the War. Of course, we took things quite serious, because anybody that picked up the newspapers at that time, whether it was 1939, 1938, 1940, you realized how serious the situation was in

the European theater with Hungary, Bulgaria, and France being overtaken by the Germans.

We had 12-inch guns all along the ocean front here. Then we also had some 12-inch guns back on the bayside, which Tom said we'll drive over and see. At the time, we did take our job quite serious and maybe in hindsight you look back and say well, nothing happened. But those things were necessary and in conjunction with we had Fort Tilden, which was over on the Rockaway side which was right in the Harbor. We had Fort Wadsworth, which was over on the Staten Island side and we also had Fort Hamilton, all with very similar type of guns.

But things moved so fast, that in 1940, these weapons were all of our basic, necessary seacoast weapons. But by 1942, most of them were gradually getting obsolete. Even though up in Atlantic Highlands and I guess it was in, here again I lose a little time whether it was '41 or '42, they put some 16-inch guns up in the back of the Twin Lights in the Highlands (Battery Lewis) and by the time they were completed, they too were obsolete. So, things were moving very, very quickly. And when they spoke about what a typical day in the life of a fella that lived here, there was no continuity, because things happened very fast.

In '41 we had the draft and then we had the trainees come in here and they were assembled right over here on the Parade Ground. They were brought over on some of the minesweepers. Then there was a Hudson River Day Line boat that they utilized, the *Chauncey De Pew* which is now a restaurant up on the Hudson somewhere. And these poor fellas, the first contingent that we received, came from the Tennessees, and from down south, and some of these fellas were from the mountains. I even had a fellow ask me, would I please mail a card to his mother. And the thing was very short and stated, "I don't know where I am Mom but all I know is that I crossed the Atlantic Ocean." (laughter) This poor guy just traveled, you know, about 22 miles from New York Harbor.

It was very difficult because most of these fellas all came out of civilian life. You know, they were bookkeepers, they were painters, they were gardeners or whatever they were, and suddenly being transported into a regimented type of scene. When they came in here, the government wasn't even prepared for full uniforms. They were using World War I uniforms. So, these fellas were coming in with wrapped leggings on. Some fellas had two left shoes. Some fellas had two right shoes. Some fellas had overcoats that were the rolled collar and ¾ length. Some of the fellas, the puttees that they had, was trailing behind them as they walked by. And we were cautioned by the brass that they are to be called trainees, not draftees. So, it was quite a thing. (question from tour inaudible) No. No. It had to be trainees.

Just one other little funny thing that might be interesting is that we also, in the second contingent, we got a bunch of fellas from the New York area. A bunch of you know hep boys, you know, hep guys, ya know, the ones that knew all the answers. So, we didn't

have any quarters for them. So we had some temporary tents set back, I don't know if we are going in that area. Are we going over there at all?

TH: We are going over near it.

FS: There is an area over there where you see a bunch of trailers. That was Tent City. Well originally, we called them pyramidal tents. They were just set up with ropes and so forth. It was kind of hazardous, because in the winter you had coal stoves, but what happened I was assigned a bunch of men. We had civilian carpenters making frames and bases for these tents. And these fellas carrying, something like 20 fellas carrying each huge 20 x 20 base. We had set up quite a few of them and I suddenly I looked around, I had given them a smoke or coffee break, or whatever it was called at the time, and I looked around and there was 5 or 6 fellas were gone. So, now this poor sergeant was now trying to get the work done. So, a bunch of the guy let out a cat call and were having a lot of fun, but now I got a little bit angry and I said, "Okay, fellas, let's go." There was maybe 14 or 15 of them. They said, "Hey wait a minute. We can't be carrying this. It takes 20 men." I said, "You think its funny. Let's go." Well, they started to pick up the base and then they realized that they were the suckers. So one of the fellas said, "Hey, we know where they are. Can we get them?" I said, "Yeah, but you guys better get back." P.S. we had 20 guys to carry the bases. These were some of the little comic, you know, things that happened, in spite of.

We always had to have 85% of the men on duty during the War years. In spite of the fact that I only lived 80 miles from here, I got home very, very infrequently because they never permitted more than 15% of the men out of here at any given time, because every gun battery was operational. I guess that about does it.

TH: What about here Fred? When this was the Guardhouse did you every pull any guard duty?

FS: Yeah, in fact, a very funny incident here, I mentioned to somebody before. When we pulled guard duty in here we used to have a contingent of men, now with the time lapse, I don't recall if it was 24 men or 28 men. I don't even remember it now. But we used to have a number of posts in this general area. We had Post #1, #2, #3, and #4 and the fellas would be for two hours on and four hours off. And in here, we would have double bunks, with just a mattress on it. And during that 24-hour period each soldier had to stay in this area and he slept there with his clothes on. You always had to be fully clothed.

One funny story is that, we had one fella that was consistently in the brig. He was just a bad guy. He didn't conform to anything so they used to call him Yardbird. He was so bad that there were times when he would get so obnoxious and they would put him into solitary. If you want to look in there later, there is a couple of cells that are only about 4 x 8 or something.

TH: Right.

FS: And there was just no where to go. You just sat on your bunk and that's it. He was so obnoxious, that he used to urinate into his cup and throw it in the guards face. There was nothing you could do. He was bad. I mean, what could you do to the guy beyond what was being done. Well about 10 years later, I happened to work for a company that they had a teamster strike. And I'm pulling up to the gate and of course, all the pickets were out there and who was one of the big professional pickets? Yardbird. (laughter) So Yardbird saw me and hollered, "Hi Sarge, how are ya?" Of course, I didn't know him and once he identified himself, then I became his buddy. And from then on, he put the word out that this guy was okay, even though we were on the other side of the fence. But I used to drive in through the picket line and "hi", ya know, good things come out of bad sometimes.

Person on tour: What was the cell occupancy rate?

FS: In here? Not many. Most of this here would be for short term. Guys that would be drunk. Fellas that would get into a little trouble at the bar. Fellas that were AWOL, ya know. So, it was not anything of real consequence because I don't think they ever kept any long-term prisoners here.

Person on tour: What was it, about 2 weeks?

FS: Yeah, that would probably be about the maximum. There was no full term prisoners. They had other places, Leavenworth and I guess the rest of them.

(inaudible talking)

FS: If there is any questions while we are still standing here?

TH: Any questions what so ever, what it was like to be here? One thing, this Army Post is quite a beautiful Post here at the end of Sandy Hook. It is named after General Winfield Scott Hancock who fought for the North, for the Union Army, during the American Civil War. It was not built in his lifetime, but it is named in his honor. And it takes in all the yellow brick buildings that we see here plus all the gun batteries, the entire north end here where most of the structures are is still considered Fort Hancock.

I mention that because whenever you say fort in your mind you visualize a big walled fortress. And you can go walking around here looking for that fort all day. But this is the type of fortification that came into use back the late 1800's the 1880's and 1890's. This one here was built right near the turn of the century in 1898 and 1899, when all these buildings were put up here.

We are going to start proceeding just up here along this row of homes, which is known as Sergeants' Row. This is where the married sergeants, including Fred, lived at for many, many years. The Row being built here, some of the houses dating back to 1898, and a few others just after 1900.

And a funny story involving me and Fred, this is how we met, because originally I was living over in his side of the duplex over here. And one day, long ago, I was waiting for my roommate to finish up with the lunch-time dishes and I was just out in the backyard. And I'm waiting for him to go back to work. And all of a sudden this car is coming down the street behind Sergeants' Row. And the car just goes by and all of a sudden it's slowing down, slowing down just down the road a little and it stops. And this gentleman, Fred, gets out of the car, sees me standing there and walks over and he said, "I'm looking for my quarters. You see I served here during World War II and I'm looking for and what's the number?

FS: 29B.

TH: 29B and I said, "29B. That's right here. That's where I'm living." So we went inside and took a look around with your wife. It brought back a lot of memories. That's how we met here.

FS: Yeah. We were roomies. (laughter)

Person on tour**:** Why are these shells of different size?

TH: Quite interesting, here are the real harbor defenders. If there had been an attack by warships, this is what would have been fired out of the massive guns that were here in the concrete gun batteries at Fort Hancock. The smaller type, if we can call them smaller, are 12-inch diameter rounds, which would have been fired from 12-inch rifles. And the much larger one here is a 16-inch diameter round. While the smaller ones here weighed about 700 some odd pounds (tape stops and starts again)

TH: Back in the woods, known as Hartshorne Woods, the Army built two gun placements. 16-inch guns were up there deep in the woods where they could fire two of these huge bullets way, way out as far what Fred about 25 – 26 miles?

FS: The 12-inch was up around 16-18 miles.

Person on tour: Where was the power of these things? Were they outside?

FS: Maybe I can explain that to you. On these shells, I'm familiar with the 12-inch primarily. The way these shells are set up is this: you take a shell like this, if you people can envision a shopping cart, they would be laid on a shopping cart and they would be adjusted to the height of the barrel of the gun, or the breach of the gun. There would be a crew of about 14 men that would be on a huge pole. And as the two fellas on this cart would bring this up to the back of the gun, this crew, with the gun commander would tell them to think home ram. They would home-ram (meaning to insert the ramrod into the gun pushing the shell in place). And they would put that extra effort. The gun is very similar to a, that's the reason they call them rifles. They have rifling, inside the barrel that gives it a spin to the right. That's the same as an ordinary gun would be. Now these

are rammed into that rifling. Now, immediately behind it now there would be several men, off of that ram crew, would now pick up this powder charge. There would be four bags of powder, roughly about 60 pounds apiece, about 240 pounds of powder. And they now would put that trough up against the barrel. And this crew now would ram that behind the shell. Now, the last one had a different type of powder, I don't even recall the name. One was fast igniting powder, a black powder. And then there would be a fellow that would be the breach man. And he now would, turn that crank, and slam that breach and tighten it in. And then they would put a primer on the back of this breach. Now they would have a lanyard, they called it, a rope maybe 12- 14 foot long. They used this, placed behind them, and they would pull that lanyard. They did electrical firing afterward but there was different methods, but that was the one method we used to use back in '35, '36 these fellows would pull a lanyard.

Now this gun was now set up over the parapet. You'll see them later. It would be down below an embankment. When it was ready to fire, there was counterweights that would set this up that that gun would be above the parapet. Once it fired, just the force of the explosion, would send that back down to its original position. Then you went through the routine. The first step, immediately, would be to open that breach. Then you would have fellas that would wash, and sponge out that chamber. They would now do, very similar to what you would do when you put the shell in. They would go in there and ram that thing with a sponge with water in it, to extinguish any of the residues that might be there. And that was just the general way of doing it.

(inaudible question):

FS: I don't recall. 45 years there is a lot of change.

Person on tour: Were there any targets that were shot at?

FS: Well, we used to fire at targets. Now they used to have these Army boats, I forget what they call them, tug boats.

TH: Target tugs.

FS: Target tugs, but what they used to do was, they used to go out, and we used to fire at a left to right course. And the reason for it was that there is a spin to the shell that if you were off sometime you could come up in the front of the target you could hit the boat. So you were much better off to get this guy in a position where if you missed, you would be going away from the boat. But, anyhow, those targets were something like about 20 foot square and they would have like a sail, on it. Now a hit, and here I don't recall, a hit would be, I don't know, 60 yards? Or 30 yards, 40? I don't even recall. But a hit would be – it didn't have to hit the target – because the chance of hitting something 14-16 miles out, that was 20 foot square was nearly impossible, because we didn't have any sophisticated system at all. (inaudible)

I just made a chart for myself. And it's hard for anybody else to understand. People always ask, "How can they fire at something like that?" "How can they direct it?" It was really a very, very, simple, method. It was nothing more than, if we assumed that this shell right here, would be the gun. The building over there would be the target. We would have at the end of this platform. We would have some men stationed at the station. They could be 5 miles, 10 miles, away but in a known position. In other words, all of this is known. But that fella would be over there. That fella would be over here near the end of this thing here. This fella will look through a transom, through azimuth instruments and see that target. This fella here would be looking at the same target. There would be a triangulation. The path would cross at some point.

We would have a board that was in the Plotting Room underneath the guns that was, what's the word, that was the same it would be yards or inches or miles, but anyhow it was programmed the same relative distances that you had out to sea. So, now we had the gun position on the plotting board. We had an arm that would register yards. Maybe 14,000, 23,000 yards, whatever it was. And we would have that spot where those fellas crossed. That would be the distance from the gun to that target.

But there were other things to consider. One thing was that when they see it is where the ship is. But 30 seconds from now or 60 seconds from now, that boat is going to be much further. So what we did was we had rulers that was pre-scaled to the various distances. Now a plotter, that was his job, he would plot the rate of speed that that ship was going. Now they would set and say it was a pre-set a plotted point where that ship was going to be 60 seconds from now. Now that's where you're going to fire. But there are other things that come into consideration. One is just like today, the wind. So we used to get meteorological messages from the meteorological station. They would give us the wind speed, the direction, the wind speed at certain altitudes, because when you lob a shell, the further you go, the higher you get. So all of those things were put through instruments and finally the compensated figures were put into the gun. And hopefully, they would hit the target at the time that the ship was going to be there. So your firing, if it takes 30 seconds to travel, you're plotting 60 seconds ahead. And that's basically it.

Person on tour: But there was another factor in there, the time of flight.

FS: Yeah, well that's what I mean, that's built into your trajectory.

TH: Let's walk up the street, because we are going to have to make a big loop around. (Tape stops and restarts) The dollar haircut.

FS: Sometimes what they would do is, an order would go out that suddenly people were letting their hair grow just a little too long. So what they would do was they would get the word out that well by next inspection, you better have a G.I. hair cut. Well, there was only one barber there. So sometimes five or six guys would line up. So what we were doing is, each guy, and of course, that was the time when they used the hand clippers, so the barber gave instructions to each guy who was next to just do the back and the side and he would take care of the rest of it. Well of course, some of the guys lived dangerously,

you know, and they would go right up the top. Well that guy had a butch. (laughter) He didn't just have a G.I. hair cut. So that was their way of expediting things.

TH: Does this look familiar right here?

FS: Yeah, yeah, that looks familiar but I think our roof was in better shape then.

TH: It was. It was.

FS: Well the only difference is that he has steam heat now, don't you? Hot air?

TH: No, its fuel oil.

FS: We used to have a belly stove, a huge belly stove. One time I had this huge stove going and I didn't realize that I didn't have it banked properly. Well, we woke up in the middle of the night and boy I tell ya, we thought the house was on fire. Well our gold fish was cooked, and our canary died. (laughter) Boy that thing really took off. I think if we were horse-shoers, we could have shoed a bunch of horses because that thing was cherry-red.

(inaudible woman asking a question to Tom)

TH: Museum Curator, this is Elaine Harmon. Park personnel had the option that they could either live outside the park or they can get what they called Government housing. This is government owned and we are charged a rent to live here. Of all the houses, good question, when were the houses built, they went up like 29, Fred and Elaine's house right here, 29 and 30, I believe went up in about 1898-1899 followed by others shortly thereafter in the early 1900's. What you have right here is the front or older part of Sergeants' Row. This was built first, and then a second area back behind here there is back row with about 4 or 5 other buildings back behind which was added in the early 1900's and I believe the last one was completed in around 1910 or 1911 way in the back there. And there was only one, all these houses are all duplexes, which means that there was a wall down the center of all but one. And the only one that is a single family dwelling is that one right there. That would probably be for the senior sergeant or sergeant major.

FS: I don't know. When we were here there, it was usually the first 3 grades would be permitted in these houses and that was like the staff sergeants, tech sergeants, master sergeants, and so forth. And then behind would be sergeants. And then wherever they could put a couple of walls together some of the poor corporals and buck sergeants and stuff got them. (Some sergeants without government issued quarters built or bought their own quarters behind Sergeants' Row.) You can see there was a class system. Lieutenants, the first three grades and then the deeper you got, you got away from it (to lower ranks).

Question: How did you get these houses? Was there a waiting list?

FS: I used to get quarters allowance I think something like $28 dollar a month. And this cost me $29 dollars a month. And that was for your fuel and everything else. The only thing you had to do was cut your own grass as they still do.

EH: No. We don't. What was your pay? What was your salary?

FS: I was very fortunate. I was getting $73 dollars a month. And then I was getting 15% longevity which is 15% of your $73. Then, I got quarters allowance, but then I paid quarters allowance. So, it worked out well. But a private got $21 dollars a month. A first class private got $30 a month. A corporal got $42 a month. And a sergeant got $54 a month. And out of that you paid your laundry and then you paid, you used to get chits, little tabs that you could go to the bar and buy, because you were out of cash a couple of days after payday. But they would sit there at the pay table, and they had buses that would take you into the city. And those I didn't recall. It might have been $1.50 round trip. I don't recall. That too, was taken out of your pay. Some fellas used to get as much as $10-$12 taken out of their pay for bus trips. So they would wind up with maybe $2 for the entire month. That's all they had. (inaudible question about food) Oh no, oh yeah, your food was, oh yeah, all you could eat.

TH: You'll notice my winter growth because the winters out here are cold. How about back in the 1940's Fred?

FS: Well, it was the same thing. Extremely cold, but it was real enjoyable because it was never severe. Even the summers were not too severe. You know you would have your 90's maybe 100 occasionally. Then you would have your 15 days in the winter that would be severe, but otherwise it was a lovely place.

TH: Gee, you were lucky, it's cold out here. How about, this is a neighborhood. Did all of the sergeants wives get along alright?

FS: Oh yeah. We had a playground directly in back of this house. I think you will see it. There was a little area back in here where all the wives and little children like in a typical park used to meet out in the back here. Then we used to do our shopping, we had a butcher that the quartermaster had, and of course, at that time you had to have ration stamps. So, if you were, in the know, (laughs) one ration stamp went as far as sometimes five or six did. They treated us well.

Person on tour: Were you allowed to have cars here?

FS: Oh sure. I had my car up here.

Person on tour: Could you choose to have your car or pay for the bus?

FS: Well, I don't even recall. I think that most of the fellas walked to the Gate.

EH: Really? Five miles.

FS: Oh yeah. In fact, as I can recall, I was always a good guy. So I used to make phony passes out. One day I'm hitchhiking up to the Gate. And who came along but my captain. And he knew he didn't give me a pass. So, he said to me, "Hop in". He took me to the Gate and they saluted him. They knew I was with the captain. I got outside the Gate and he said, "Don't ever do that again." (laughter)

EH: Wasn't there a gimmick about the pencil?

FS: Yeah. They had real secret codes. It was really tough to break and on the passes they used to have different outfits had different things. Our outfit had a little x. A stamp pad x. Well, it wasn't long before every fella in the place had a pencil with a little "x" cut in the eraser. That's all it was. They took the pencil and put it on a stamp pad and they could stamp their own pass. That was the secret code. (laughter)

TH: I can't imagine walking out of here, which many a soldier did. We're talking about this area here up at the north end, walking down the main road. When we talk about the main Gate. You know where the toll plaza is? Theres a red brick building down there. That was the military reservation front Gate. And we're talking a good 5 miles. And imagine walking that in January.

FS: Well, we did have boats. We used to have boats up here that came into the Coast Guard area. And they used to leave at say 4:30 in the afternoon. And they would arrive earlier than that on the way back. The crew that was going out, coming in, had to be here so that the next crew could go out, because we always had to have 85% of the men here. And if those fellas didn't come back from pass, you didn't go out, because these guns were fully manned at all times. They were always manned.

TH: Okay. Let's continue walking. (Tape stops and starts again)

FS: (in the middle of a conversation) He picked up the wrong end of the gun. He was very fortunate that they had to have 14 parts of the intestines that they had to re-sew. They said he was extremely fortunate, but the bullet had went right through him. It happened right in the guard house". By accident, yeah.

TH: .45 automatics are tricky.

FS: At that time the first three graders used to carry .45 automatics. The officers used to carry, most of them, used to carry revolvers, .45 revolvers. Then we went to carbines later on, which is much easier to handle.

EH: Fred, are there any good stories about the commissary? Anything that you remember? (tape stops and restarts)

FS: She thinks that anything that happened to me was scandal. (laughter) And of course, most of it was. (laughter) Well, when we had quarters on the post at that time there was ration stamps. I don't think that anybody here is old enough to realize that every time you bought any meat, you had to have ration stamps. You were only allocated so many pounds per month. So it just happens, that the fella that was the butcher in charge here, was in my outfit. So of course, very diplomatically I said to him, "Say look here Franz, take care of my wife." She used to be terribly upset because she used to go in there and buy something that would take 30 ration stamps and she would have five and he would even give her change for the five. So, it was larceny that was going on. It's not new to our generation now. (laughter)

TH: Fred, was the Commissary in use during World War II?

FS: Yes. Yes.

TH: This building was designated in the historic reference as The Commissary. What would a Commissary be, for the folks here, tell them what that is?

FS: No. No. Commissary was where you bought the food. They had a huge butcher shop in here. And any of the personnel on the Post could buy their food in here. As I recall, I believe you had to be a resident. It wasn't open that any soldier could go in and buy something for his family anywhere.

Person**:** Was it like the PX?

FS: Well, the PX was down by the jail. The PX was one that had watches, and tooth paste and brushes and ice-cream sodas. In fact, a very funny story up there is that back in those days, the used to use double talk. Does anyone ever use double talk anymore?

TH: It's a dead art.

FS: It's a dead art. Did kids ever use double talk at all? Well, double talk is nothing more than making words sound like they are a real word and you put them together quickly. It drives you bananas.

Person on tour: Give us an example.

FS: Well, I wasn't good at it. You had to be a real artist. In other words, you would say, "One would take a "safranakus" and what's a "safranakus." This one fella that we had, he was gifted, he could talk to people, and you would stand there and you would swear that you heard what he was saying. You would try and listen and you would say well I got part of it. And he'd say, "Look I'll start all over again." You remember double talk, years ago. So, we went into the PX and he went up and wanted an ice-cream soda. So he made that clear and he said to the fella, "I'd like an ice cream soda with "xzxagdvacdccZ" And he would start to use double talk. So, the fella would say, "Please could you repeat that," so he repeated it. Finally the fella said to him, "Ya know,

I'm sorry, but I don't hear you." Then he said, "Look, I'm gonna tell you one more time." I'd like a chocolate soda, with vanilla ice cream," and he went through it. And the fella said, "So help me. I'm gonna quit this dam job." He said, "There is so much noise in here that I can't hear the people speak." But this is the kind of tormenting that silly things did.

Person on tour: Double talk isn't a lost art.

FS: It isn't?

Person on tour: Washington uses it all the time. (laughter)

TH: I stand corrected.

EH: Thank you.

TH: There used to be two buildings. See we are getting out of the housing area and we are getting up into what was a true support area, things that would support all the troops out here. A good example, this corner now is empty. You can see the depression in the earth right here. That's a foundation. And you might correct me, but the post office.

FS: I don't remember. I don't recall.

TH: There was a small yellow brick post office building that stood here, according to the floor plan for Fort Hancock. And then right here there's all these young trees growing up because the ground goes down. It's a big foundation back here. That was a huge refrigeration house for the meat. They had a big house here. Just one big building that was one huge refrigerator like you see in old style butcher shops when they go into the meat locker and they had one big huge warehouse building back here. Both stood until the mid 60's then for some reason the Army tore them down. Maybe because they were falling apart by the early 1960's. We even see right here a foundation here. A concrete foundation which was originally the coal bins and when Fred was here it had been converted to the 16 car garage, and I understand was for officers.

FS: Yeah. The coal yard were back maybe a couple of hundred feet back behind these houses here. They had a huge coal pile. And when you needed any fuel for you house, you would call up and they would deliver a ton right to your basement.

TH: How did they deliver back then? Was it by truck?

FS: Yeah it was by truck. I am sure. We didn't have horses here at that time (laughter)

(Talking in the background about coal chutes - also someone asked if there was an ice house on the post - and someone asked which one was Fred's house)

TH: 29B when we first stopped there. That was Fred's house. Let's continue down here. There are more warehouses and we'll take a look at the Movie Theater which we still use.

FS: Did that bring back memories to you?
(Tape stops and starts again.)

TH: These warehouses, did they have them back during World War II?

FS: Well, that was the quartermaster where they had all the clothing. So, whenever they used to require clothing, your individual supply sergeant, used to draw from here. The typical thing, he would have requisitions and approval and so forth. But no G.I. had any particular access to this at all. We didn't have any reason to come into here at all.

EH: Did you get dishes and silverware also from the Quartermaster? Besides the uniform?

FS: Yeah, that was all supplied, but, here again, all through your individual supply sergeants. Then you had supply warehouses right in your own battery group would have your own supply sergeant. No. None of us had any direct dealing these places here. That was the wholesale, in a sense, you know.

TH: Perhaps, its nothing more now than a run-down abandoned warehouse now, but perhaps its main claim to fame is the fact that back in 1908 when the Army was building a spur line, a small railroad branch over by Horseshoe Cove about a mile and a half south of here on the bay side. The Army people and the construction workers accidentally found the famous burial vault that had been lost since after the Revolution. It contained the bones of 14, stand corrected, 15 British seamen who perished here back in the last day of 1783, looking for deserters from their warship which was anchored out here in Sandy Hook Bay. And as they left the ship looking for deserters, they got stuck in a blizzard and perished here at Sandy Hook, were later found by their comrades from the warship and buried on Sandy Hook. Their monument was destroyed and the shifting sands of Sandy Hook covered over any trace of their burial vault until the Army came along in 1908 came along and accidentally discovered these bones. The bones were taken to this quartermaster warehouse right here where an Army private, who lived to the ripe old age of, young age, I should say about 92, Mr. Lander Radford was stationed here 1906 to 1912. And one of his duty stations was here in the warehouse. And here they come from Horseshoe Cove, with all these bones. And he told, he was given the order to make wooden boxes to hold each set of bones which, as Mr. Radford told us, he always felt was rather silly, because you didn't know who was who. But the Army insisted on putting every set of bones, as complete as possible, into small wooden boxes which he, personally, made. And it was quite a thrill for us to meet him several years ago and have him tell us this. And here was an Army soldier who actually touched history connected with the end of the American Revolution. He boxed the bones of Halyburton, and his men, who had set out to find these deserters. It was done here. Then the boxed remains were brought up to Brooklyn, to Cypress Hills National Cemetery in Brooklyn and buried

with honors, these British seamen, who had once been our foe in the American Revolution. And there they lie today, although, a few years after they had been buried, someone in the Army saw the error of their way and put all the bones together in one mass grave. And today they have a big boulder with their full names on it. But here is where they were taken in their last journey.

Person on tour: What kind of vault was it?

TH: It was a cut stone cemented together. In all the years that I have been at Sandy Hook I've spent several hours down there looking at the ground trying to figure out where, exactly where, a rather large, I guess, looking at the worn old photograph we have of the day they found the vault. There must be like a 10 x 10 stone vault, square in shape, Probably had a slate stone lid over it then they just put earth and sand over that with a monument. But the monument got vandalized. Somebody came along maybe 20 or 30 years after the monument had been put over the vault and destroyed it completely. With the wind here, blowing the sand all over the place, it easily got lost and forgotten for almost a hundred years until the Army accidentally discovered it again.

There are some interesting buildings over here and I know a lot of veterans who served here always ask me, "Is the bakery still standing here?" And at first I wondered why there was such an interest in the bakery, but it was kind of explained to me.

FS: It was the odor.

TH: The odor, the fragrance of hot bread early in the morning.

FS: The Army hot bread isn't the typical white bread that you get today. It really had body, just like when you bake anything in the oven. That aroma would just emanate from that place you couldn't help but be hungry. It was just wonderful.

EH: How much was the bread there, do you recall?

FS: Well, I wouldn't recall. This was all that we used in the barracks.

TH: We were fortunate to have so many veterans come back to share their memories. One was the son of a worker here, a civilian worker for the Army. And this man who grew up here from 1908 to 1927 his whole childhood and young adulthood was spent here when his Dad was working for the Army, recalled that back in the early 1900's it was 3 cents for the small loaf and 5 cents for the large and that when they got it back to Mom and Dad, sometimes it was hollow. And you know what that means, Mom would send them out on the errand to get a fresh loaf of bread right here from the Post Bakery, that building right there, on their way walking home, the inside of it disappeared. But with no exaggeration, the small loaf, was equivalent to a very large loaf of bread today what you would buy in the supermarket.

(Talking in the background)

FS: We used to buy 5 cents worth of soup greens. And then your mother said to ask them to throw a bone in with it.

TH: This is the Bakery and let's walk around. And this is where Fred left the Army. This building was it?

FS: Yeah

TH: Lets detour right down through here and take a look. Here you had a real hard duty station, a real hard life. I think that what's very fascinating about Officers' Row is that, notice that the front porches don't face the Parade Ground inward. They face over here to the west away from the Parade Ground facing out toward Sandy Hook Bay, where lately, for the last several days we've been having these gorgeous sunsets. It was really tough on those officers. Let me tell you. (laughter) This lawn area between us standing right here by the Post Movie theater, and Officer House #1, the first house in Officers' Row, was a dirt tennis court. A double court right here that used to have a fence. It was all fenced in. And once again, those officers had a real tough time here. Let me tell you. Work, work, work … Fred mentioned something interesting. The lawn area right here, across the street this entire area right here, was for the West Point Cadets?

FS: Yeah. The West Point Cadets used to come down here for their summer encampment and many of these fellas were involved with the Coast Artillery. So we had occasion to sleep in these tents, one time. We had, I remember, white beetles, just infested the place. All of our wool uniforms were eaten. Holes eaten into our uniform in a two-week period. But there were huge white beetles, in this entire place. We had a very funny thing here in this Chapel. One of the fellas in our outfit got married and you are always looking for an excuse for a party. So he got married, and for the procession, we had a fellow that had a very uncomplimentary name, and I won't even mention 'cause he was kind of a seedy guy. But he could play the accordion very well. So the procession started from here and marched down the street to our barracks about a quarter of a mile back. And here the wedding procession is going down and he's playing, "Here Comes the Bride," over and over again. And then in the afternoon we had a wedding reception for the couple. And of course, how do you have a party? You had mess halls just with plain tables. So everybody had to give up their sheets for the night. So we covered the tables with bed sheets. And boy, I tell ya, it was a luxurious, wonderful wedding dinner that we had.

Person on tour: Who paid for the reception?

FS: There was no, this was our dinner, there was nothing exceptional. You always had a supply sergeant, was able to negotiate somewhere, to get something. So, I'm sure he gave a pair of shoes, to get a bottle of booze, you know.

EH: Can you tell about taking up a collection? That was a sad story.

FS: Yeah that was a sad story. When the trainees first came here, they were put into quarantine. And here again, time erases a lot of memories, but they were put into quarantine. I don't even remember, five weeks, three weeks, two weeks. I don't remember the period of time. But when these fellas were put over there it seems like they all came from civilian life and I guess everybody felt, well, you go into the service, I gotta have pocket money. You know poor little son had to have $10, in his pocket, $20. So, they were kind (inaudible) compared to the guy who made $21 dollar a month. So a couple of sergeants got together and we got a beer container. If anybody doesn't know what it is, it's like when you go to a Chinese restaurant and you get soup in a container, and we put a slit in the top. And we put a sign wrapped around it, "in memory of Sgt. Schlitz" who passed on. (Laughter) So these poor fellas, they thought it was some poor sergeant died. They didn't realize that it was beer that we were refilling, ya know. So we all drank pretty well that day, you know. These poor guys, one fella that came from Tennessee or Kentucky and I guess he had never gotten out of the Blue Ridge Mountains. And he was drafted and was sent to Grand Central Station in New York. And then they were put on a boat. It was a mine sweeper, and this can get pretty rough out here in the Narrows, especially when you are on a boat of that type. And he came across here and he said to me, "Sergeant, please, my mother is worried. Can you send this card for me?" I said, "Sure." And I read the card and it was short and sweet. It said, "Mom I don't know where I am but I know that I crossed the Atlantic Ocean." So, she probably envisioned that he was in Germany or France. (laughter)

TH: Fred, here at the movie theater would they have first run movies? Would they have any shows for the troops back during the War here?

FS: No. This strictly was for a movie theater. We used to have a USO theater up past the..

TH: By the missiles?

FS: Yeah, the missiles, up past the guest houses and up by the hospital (Where Guardian Park is today was the Service Club). We used to have a USO and we used to go up there. In fact, a very funny story, a fellow that was with me and we went in and they had an ice cream fountain. So this fellow that was with me sitting on a stool like I was, and he ordered an ice cream soda. And of course, at that time we were young and frivolous, and we were looking at all the young gals, ya know. And he's looking at this girl here behind the counter and his eyes are popping out. And as she's going by, he says to the guy next to him, he says, "How'd you like to have an affair with her?" So this guy says, "Well, I do, it's my wife." (laughter)

TH: How much were the movies back then?

FS: I don't recall.

TH: Were you charged money or could you get in on a chit?

FS: You had to pay for it. But I was very offended when they charged my child. My baby girl was 2 years old, 3 years old and they charged her half price. It might have been 12 cents, I don't know, but I was offended. (laughter)

TH: A lot of the movies were war-time themes, you know, about what was going on?

FS: No. It would be light theater.

TH: Really.

FS: We used to have session where we used to have Japanese films, and the horror films. Ya know what they were doing with torture, ya know, the under the nail kind of stuff and the spikes in the ground.

EH: So this was entertainment? Pure entertainment.

FS: Entertainment. Yeah

TH: But even the movies, I'm sorry, but what I meant to say, a lot of the Hollywood movies were war-time oriented.

FS: But there wouldn't have been anything that would have been anything that would have sunk in. We had a lot of good shows up here. The USO. We had Bob Hope, we had Lana Turner.

TH: Some of the famous people that visited were who?

FS: Lana Turner, Bob Hope, Jerry Colona. You know the whole USO group you know. But Lana Turner visited here one time and we were going to put a demonstration on for her at the gun. So here, my captain, he's making points, he's got a famous movie star here. And he's a dapper, dapper guy you know. Now they did the routine, like we did before, they bring the shell up to the gun. Somebody miscalculated and sent the shell fell down into the well, but it was only a dummy. But I'll tell ya, that caused panic and nonsense.

EH: What did Lana think?

FS: Lana was great. I don't know.
(Tape stops and starts again)

FS: One of six fellows that came up with a regiment of 2,500 fellows when I was discharged from here. Well, I lived across the street from Post Headquarters. And the day I was to be discharged, I went across the street and had my couple of Hail Mary's and I came back home and I was a civilian. That night I took my wife to the Post Theater. In fact, I was here so long and knew so many people, they turned the house

lights on. And of course, the ham bone that I am, I was bowing, the guys were applauding like heck, ya know. I was finally a civilian.

Person on tour: When did you go?

FS: October of '45. October 30th I believe.

TH: There was still a lot of activity, although by that time the War was over.

FS: Oh yeah, everybody was getting out on points.

TH: Okay, we'll go back out and walk further around.

FS: Son of a gun. We used to catch striped bass out here like crazy. One day I said to him, "Father, how come you have so much luck?" He said, "Well I've got two things going for me." He said, "I take a shot of whiskey every morning and I pray to God." Just lately I heard a story very similar. (Tape stops and starts again.)

Person on tour: What was this here?

TH: Just an open area which talking to veterans here who served here during the 1920's and the 1930's will tell you that, right about where you are, right here, that big black cannon barrel used to be here for many, many years. The post commander here, back in 1903 asked the ordnance people, because the ocean side here of Sandy Hook was known as the Sandy Hook Proving Ground where the Army used to test fire its new cannons and gun powder and things like that. They used to line up their new guns for test firing here at the north end, firing down the beach at sand dunes firing south. And over there, in one of the areas over by the new guns, was an area called the ordnance graveyard where guns that had blown up or were just old from use, were just discarded, laying in a heap. And because this commander of Fort Hancock wrote the letter saying, "Can we have that big old cannon that you have just laying there?" He saved it from being scrapped and we would have lost one of the largest cannons ever made. And there it is the largest, muzzle loading smooth bore cannon that was ever made by the Army. It's called a Rodman Gun. There were two guns made, and that's the number two gun over there. And those cannon balls over there are 20-inch in diameter. And that cannon could fire that type of a cannon ball weighing half a ton a distance of almost five miles, which back in the Civil War days was an incredible feat to do. And because back in 1903 it was obsolete, it was an outdated cannon and it probably would have been melted down for scrap. It was actually saved when the commander here said, "Hey we could use it for lawn decoration?" But for many, many years from 1903 into the 1930's it was right here on the lawn taking up space. Then a CCC camp, a Civilian Conservation Corps established a camp out here and the Army was in charge of it. And one of the projects they had the C.C.C. boys do was to build that concrete base over there and then they set the cannon on the base as a monument. And it's been there ever since, I believe, about 1937. But there it is a monster gun. Muzzle loading means the front of the cannon up there, is where they first load the black powder bag was put in first and rammed down. And then one of those big

cannon balls was also rammed down and was loaded from the front of the muzzle. And smoothbore referring to the inside of the cannon was a smooth wall. It didn't have the spiral grooves Fred was telling us about. But that's what revolutionized warfare was the spiral grooves gave birth to the long pointed nosed shells, or bullets, that we were looking at over at the Museum. Looking also over here, here was the first firehouse over here which we still use because the Park Ranger staff here is the Fire Department. That was built in 1905. Next door to it over to the right, is originally what was the blacksmith shop out here built around 1899. Because the Army was not run by trucks and jeeps many, many, years ago at the turn of the century. It was run on mule power. Perhaps you've heard of the saying, "That good old Army mule." The U.S. Army mule was the backbone of getting all the wagons and small artillery pieces moved around. Horses took larger field artillery around. But you have the blacksmith shop there, which later on, when the firehouse was built, became the firemen's dormitory. You would have a small staff of soldiers stationed in there, sleeping in there, who would be the fire team. The mule stables was right over here. And you can see where they have modern windows in there now and you can see all the plastic bags and cans in there and this is now our recycling center ably, ably, set up by Mrs. Elaine Harmon. Let's hear it for Elaine. (Applause) Originally that was big wide doors so that the mules could go in and out and that's where they had their stables in there. They had stalls for upwards of 60 mules. But I think a more satisfactory count would have been about 30 or 40 because it's a pretty big building. But in its day, that was turned from a mule stable into a barracks and from a barracks into an open mess hall, which was still in use back in the summer of 1974 before most of the facilities here at Fort Hancock were closed down. This fence over here now marks the Coast Guard boundary. All of Sandy Hook was Army property, but when the Army closed operations in 1974 they gave the whole tip area, starting right here with this fence, they made a boundary and gave about 200 acres from here onto the tip, to the US Coast Guard. In fact, you can see one of their 44 foot cutters coming into the dock right now. That white boat coming right at us over there is a Coast Guard patrol cutter.

Person on tour: Is anyone ever allowed to go out to the end of the tip?

TH: Well, its Coast Guard property. Technically, you're not supposed to go up there.

FS: They have tours occasionally. (Tape stops and starts.)
(People talking in the back ground) We had farmers here in Sandy Hook.

TH: This is perhaps, the best farm land on Sandy Hook was right here where a building stood for many years, and that was the horse stable. This was a big corral right in here. The empty lawn space where we walked from the mule stables to here were also corrals for mules, fenced in areas for mules. And over here there was a large concrete building with a fence around it for the Army horses. The only thing is that in 1941, I believe, '40 or '41 they started building all the wooden Army barracks and all this what is now empty area was actually filled with mess halls and barracks that were made of wood like the one you see right back here. That's one of the survivors. That white building there was a World War II barracks. The red brick barracks was an Army barracks but it was later taken over by the Coast Guard who moved out in 1975 over to a new building over in

their area. Fred, do you remember the green houses that stood over here, the post green houses?

FS: No. We didn't have any occasion to get involved at all. I remember the Officers' Club and the Non-Com Club.

TH: But it was your barracks though was back in here?

FS: Our barracks were right adjoining the guns because some of these, and I don't even remember. We had Potter, we fired Potter already, and we fired…

TH: Granger?

FS: No and what's the name of the other one?

TH: Battery Potter is extremely historic as far as America's harbor fortifications go because for many centuries any harbor, in any country, was usually defended by a massive fort made of granite or brick walls, with large windows through which large cannons could fire through the walls at an enemy fleet, to prevent that fleet from invading a maritime city. And right here, we are about 20 miles south of New York City and we are fronting on the Atlantic Ocean so, this is why Fort Hancock was so important. It was a first line of defense to stop the enemy offshore as they approached a place like this if they had, and sink them offshore or as they tried to enter New York Harbor. This place is so extremely important to the whole history of all American harbor forts because it marks the departure, the end of one era, and the beginning of another, where the Army abandoned, back in the 1890's, they were not going to use anymore, the walled fort made of brick or granite walls. Simply because the large rifle guns used in the Civil War, could pulverize brick or granite walls. So, they went for something bigger and better. And that was reinforced concrete. And America's first concrete disappearing gun battery is this, which the Army would name Battery Potter in honor of General Joseph Potter who fought during the Civil War. And it was completed back in the early 1890's and was really something. They had a lot of steam-powered machinery inside to lift two huge elevators. And on each elevator, was a gigantic gun barrel or rifle, 12-inch rifle, which was loaded inside at the second floor level. And after loading was pushed up on each elevator. Each elevator had a gun one on the left side and another over on the right side. And after they were loaded by the gun crews down inside, they came up through a big square hole in the roof. So the square platform as it came in, fit right into the square, came to a stop, and some soldiers rode up with the gun and wherever the target was, they would swing the gun barrel over and elevate it up, and fire. And once they fired, they elevated it back and then the whole thing, gun and platform, weighing 108 tons, was pulled back down inside for reloading. Ironically, at the same time that this was being completed, the Army was testing the famous counterweight carriages. And there was several designs of a counterweight carriage that didn't use masses of machinery under steam power, but a simple counterweight. It was a huge lead counterweight that hung underneath the gun barrel. And as we shall see down the street as we walk, we'll go and

visit Fort Hancock's first counterweight gun battery which replaced this. And although it sounds like there goes technology again and even back then, making something obsolete, when it's practically brand new, it didn't come about that quickly. Since the Civil War, the 1860's, Army officers were trying to develop a carriage that would lift the gun up over your wall, fire at the enemy, and come back down and hide from the enemy's view. But they just couldn't get the technology. And they could never get a practical working carriage to work. But in the late 1880's and the 1890's as the Army went ahead and built this, they did get the technology and did perfect the counterweight carriage. One of which was chosen. It was the brainstorm of two ordnance officers; Buffington and Crozier and hence was known as the Buffington and Crozier counterweight carriage. But because this became obsolete, by a simple to build, cheaper to build carriage, this ended up, Battery Potter, was the one and only of its kind. But it was the first of its kind, the first disappearing gun battery. And today, it looks more like Dracula's castle than a gun battery.

Person on tour: Speaking of castles, were those rifle slits or just decorative?

TH: Yes. This is what makes it so interesting. For centuries you not only had gigantic walled forts with hundreds of cannons to blast the enemy fleet, but a lot of riflemen too, would take positions up at the top of a fort with the rifles and blast enemy soldiers who might land, try to invade, your fort. And here, the Army was going to do away with that concept. In the early 1890's, they were going to do away with worrying about your fort being surrounded by enemy soldiers, and yet they planned for that. They were still afraid. They were going to leave that centuries and centuries old concept of defending with soldier riflemen and yet they still incorporated it. Here in the back, though, and although when two of the guns came up on the roof and could be rotated to fire in any direction, the ocean, and if the enemy went into the harbor, if they went into the bay. Even if they were landing soldiers down at the end of Sandy Hook, the guns could fire in a complete circle. But they still were not taking any chances, in that era, they planned for a rear defense with riflemen firing the rifles through slits. And, right there, you can see these windows, there's one on the side, around the turret, there's one under the cornerstone, and around the right turret there's another window. Those were for Gatling guns. They not only had riflemen firing the rifles through the slits, but they could also hand crank their five barrel Gatling guns to throw out a lot of lead, a big reception for sneaky enemy soldiers trying to sneak up from the rear here.

FS: A good example at Fort Hamilton, from the Brooklyn side, they have a little fort there and they have slits very similar to this but a little bit larger. And that too, was in case the enemy came from behind. But they were small cannons that ran across. And these cannons rolled forward into those slits. And once they were fired, they were brought back to be reloaded. And that too, was not for the enemy out to sea, but it was for anybody that came around their flank. And it's very similar as to what this is for.

TH: They were going to go with the very simply designed, cheaper to build, quicker firing counterweight carriage. But the guns were maintained here into the summer of 1906, because unlike the counterweight guns which could only fire towards the ocean, or

down the shore, or up the shore, counterweight guns could not rotate around to fire to the rear, as we shall see. But these guns could.

(inaudible question)

Well, originally they built one small room right in there to have a generator, a dynamo. And it was too small a generator to make electrical light inside the tunnels. As a result, soldiers, during gun drills, had a poor working light, it was hard to see what they were doing. So later on, they built this very large red brick generator building to have huge dynamo generators in there to make electricity for Potter, Battery Granger down the street, and also the Mortar Battery back down by the Lighthouse. (Tape stops and starts again.) They took the guns away, then roofed in the two big square openings then built, what you see there now on the roof, those buildings. And those where known as fire control stations, meaning, soldiers were on watch, like Fred said earlier at the Museum. You would have soldiers up there with high powered telescopes to track your target out in the ocean. And they would control the artillery fire of their respective gun batteries. We have many up over there on the north end. We have others going south of Battery Potter. But their fire control was here. They would get their coordinates where the moving target was from those stations up there. And the soldiers working up there were in communication, they were in touch with the gun crews at the other gun batteries via Army telephone operators who operated in these two concrete buildings down here. So, they did their spotting up there, the soldiers in the back rooms would plot the line of fire on the plotting board from a gun battery to the moving target, and the coordinates were telephoned to the gun commanders and the gun crews at the concrete gun batteries. So this, from 1907 right through into World War II, was a very important place. This is where they spotted targets. Today, we try to keep cool in there. (laughter)

TH: We were never fired against an enemy in anger, but every summer, especially starting now, May through September, they had what they called, "Annual Service Practice." And in fact, when the generator building was built in 1901, and they brought up their guns for their summer artillery practice and towed targets out in the ocean, they let off some shots here which moved the roof over a couple of feet. The tremendous shock wave, the concussion of the 12-inch guns firing on top of Potter made a ripple effect right through the roof here. All those plates up there, the corrugated metal plates tore off their bolts and moved over a few feet.

TH (responding to a question): Telephone operators. They would link the spotters to the gun crews.

FS: Just an example of what you were saying before about the steel plates, when the first shot that they fired, the concussion was so great that the steel doors like that on the front of this building they were 5/8 inch thick, those doors were bowed in from the concussion. So, the engineers had to come in and drill holes, to equalize the pressure in there. You can imagine, some fellas were standing four feet, five feet away from it. That's when they used to tell you to cup your hands over your ears, facing away from the gun, they

would ask you to keep your mouth open to equalize pressure, and stand on your toes. So it was nothing, really, when you did it properly.

Person on tour: Why did you do that?

FS: It was a tremendous, whrrrmpf when that air went. You would stand on your toes and cup your ears and keep your mouth open. You looked like a moron, like that, ya know, (laughter) but you could have broken ear drums.

TH: Broken ear drums or you could have a bloody nose- a tremendous concussion effect.

FS: Yes. And we had access to the guns here and then later on…what was the one up here?

TH: Battery Granger.

FS: Battery Granger, and later the guns at Kingman and Mills, which was three miles down. And we slept with the guns during the War, we couldn't return to our barracks, we had to sleep at the gun emplacements.

TH: Fred, did any of the soldiers, when you were stationed here, come down with poison ivy?

FS: Oh sure.

TH: There it is on your left, all that green shiny stuff.

FS: And it was always the macho guy that said, "It doesn't bother me. I never get that." And the next thing you know he's got it all over. (laughter)

Person on tour: Are we going to go by the Lighthouse?

TH: Yeah, that's where we're going down by Granger then by the Lighthouse.

FS: We used to have a diet of beach plums. This place is filled with beach plums.

EH: It still is.

Person on tour: You really harvest those?

FS: Ohhh, we used to eat those like crazy.

(Talking in background)

EH: Tom is going to have a beach plum walk. September 29th, is it?

TH: August.

EH: Is it August?

TH: I hope it's late in the year. September?

(Talking in the background about the beach plum walk)

EH: What were you starting to tell me about?

FS: I was just starting to say that garbage rack that we had, that was the most dirtiest thing. I'm amazed that its not still here. It was made of all reinforced concrete.

EH: Indestructible?

(Background talking. Tape stops and starts again.)

TH: Gun Battery on this spot too. Another Battery Potter number two. On the original plan, before they started naming gun batteries after Army officers… let's just watch this road as we stand here because there's cars coming and going on this road, especially with the children, okay? They went by they were unnamed except the Army engineers would have a plan like Lift Gun Battery #1. Well, that was Battery Potter. And then, they had for this spot, Lift Gun Battery #2 but of course, as this was being introduced, and that was being finished down the street, this was cheaper to build, easier for the soldiers to take care of, and to fire, quicker firing, they dropped plans to build another Battery Potter type gun battery here. And this is what became standard, not only around New York Harbor, but also Long Island Sound, Chesapeake Bay, Boston Harbor, San Francisco Bay. America's major sounds and harbors were protected, by what I call concrete defenders, the concrete gun batteries. It's the open pit type, where you had an open pit there. That's gun number 1. And you had gun number 2 up here. And you can see from this old photograph here, how the soldiers would load from the back end, from the breach. They're putting in the shell here. And here's your bag of gun powder which would follow. They closed the breach block to block the back end, or the breach of the gun. And once they tripped the counterweight, the gun would go up into what they called in battery, firing position. Fred you were saying earlier, that you fired here, right?

FS: Yeah, we fired these guns.

TH: What was that like?

FS: Well, same thing. You had a lot of concussion here, because it would reverberate toward the structures here. And we fellas, when we were working in the plotting room, we were getting all the data by phone, and then computing, what we were talking about before. We used to do that downstairs here. Now here again, it's been 40 some odd years, I don't recall because we had a number of batteries, the plotting room used to be downstairs then your range officer used to be up here in this place here. And when you

fired a shot, he would make a determination if your next shot would be down a couple of degrees or a horizontal angle to the left or to the right. And he would make corrections rather than have because we would work on bells at 30 seconds or we could fire on 60 second bell. So everything was coordinated down here and he would use that data to make visual changes. That's about the only thing involved.

TH: What did they sound like? Was it like thunder like you hear during a thunder storm?

FS: It would be, not a frightening thing. It's not like something that is exploding. It's more like a "vvvvoooommmm" and a rush of hot air that would be generated. But not a crack. When we fired like .155 or a 6-inch (guns), you would have a terrible crack that you could hear that reverberate through your body. This was more like a "vvvooommm".

TH: And it was also up over the concrete parapet too.

FS: Yeah when we fired, right.

EH: How many would you fire in a day?

FS: We never fired more than maybe three or four rounds is the most that we ever fired, because these barrels were limited. I don't even recall. I think a barrel could, did you ever get any data on it?

TH: 50 rounds.

FS: Something like 40-50 rounds and the gun was no good anymore, the rifling. Because it would break the rifling in the gun.

TH: What you're doing here is, there are two things that will wear away your gun. First of all, you've got a big bullet. Here, these were called 10-inch rifles, meaning that the bullet was 10-inch diameter, and the core of the cannon was 10-inches. And when you fire a bullet, at the back of it you have what is called a rotating band made of copper. And when it moves down inside the barrel the copper band starts to take up the rifling, those spiral grooves and that cuts into the copper band at the back of the bullet and starts spinning the shell. So when she's going down the barrel, she's spinning, spinning, spinning, and when she leaves she's spinning at a tremendous rate of speed. That speeding revolutionized warfare. It made your bullet go much farther and faster to the target. So, when it hit, it hit with great impact and on target at a much greater range. Many more miles than say that Rodman Gun that was a smooth bore. But imagine with every round, firing again and again, 10 bullets, 20 bullets, 30, 40, and 50, each one is wearing away the spiral grooves, and also the corrosive effect of each gun powder. What would be the charge here, about 80 pounds?

FS: Well, on the 12-inch we would use about 240 pounds.

TH: 240 pounds but that's a big bang. One big bang inside.

Person on tour: And Tom, those were solid projectiles, right?

TH: Well, they actually, the head, the pointed nose, is solid. And going down the back part, inside an area about that hollow in the back part of the shell is where they put a high explosive like TNT inside. The idea is to punch a hole, here is your bullet flying from here the gun battery out towards the ocean toward an enemy ship, say, and the idea is for that bullet to hit the side of the ship and punch through with the pointed nose. And go through the armor side, go inside, then the fuse at the base of the shell would ignite. Once the shell was inside the battleship, say, the fuse at the bottom of the shell would ignite the inside. And the shell would blow up backwards. And most blast would blow out the side of the ship creating a big hole in the side of the ship. Hence, they called them armor piercing shells.

FS: That's actually what they called them, armor piercing because the front end was a heavy type of material that would puncture armor on a ship. And the shell, itself, would not activate or wouldn't even trigger, until you had centrifugal force, in other words, once that rotated; then they had a mechanism that would set this thing for impact. Once you had impact and you hit, then only then would the charge go off. So if you picked that shell up and it was a live shell and you dropped it somewhere, nothing would happen. Nothing at all.

Person on tour: If they were only good 50 rounds, did they have extra guns around?

FS: Well, yeah, that's what I say, you had Fort Hamilton, Fort Wadsworth, Fort Tilden, you had Sandy Hook. What was something like 14 of them?

TH: Extra gun barrels.

FS: They were available and you had engineers that could get them in probably in 6 months. It wouldn't be immediately.

Person on tour: So these were only effective …..

TH: For one battle (laughter)

FS: But you have to remember that even these guns were only limited to heavy cruisers or destroyers. If it was a little gun boat you wouldn't fire these rounds.

(Someone talking in the background about watching out for Poison Ivy)

FS: Within a half an hour they were out of range one way or another. If they were under-range, you couldn't fire this three miles down, four miles down. You just couldn't fire at the ship. You just didn't have the trajectory for it. You had to fire at something 10 miles, 12 miles, 14 miles. They were limited.

TH: Between the bullet going down, the rifling, and plus tremendous explosion, of each round of gun powder, that all had a limiting effect on the inside of your gun. But these big guns are for big ships. That's all. That's what you're going to be firing at. Way offshore, like Fred says, 12–15 miles away from here.

Person on tour: What kind of range did those guns have?

TH: The old disappearing guns were really limited, though. Fred's high angle 12-inch guns had a 18 miles.

FS: About 18 miles that's about it.

Person on tour: The guns on a ship coming toward you ….

TH: They were just as limited. They had to come in close to get a round off.

FS: But they had 16s (inch guns) too.

Person on tour: They were more dangerous because they were mobile.

(Tape stops and starts again in Lighthouse area)

TH: There was a big round beach coming right through this area and curving out over to where the houses are by Sandy Hook Bay. Of course, Fort Hancock was not here, the gun batteries were not here, and right here is where there was a big, wide, sandy, curving, sandy beach meeting the Ocean. This was the tip of Sandy Hook in 1764, in this general area. The ocean waves have continued to push sand up the Jersey sea shore adding more and more sand, and the tip kept growing way, way out in that direction. While Battery Potter was America's first concrete disappearing gun battery, the same time Potter was being built, this was being built. This was America's first concrete Mortar Battery. There are four huge concrete pits back in here. Each one mounted four huge cannons called mortars. Four pits, four mortars to a pit that's 16 mortars. And the idea was to fire all 16 mortars at the same time sending 16 half ton bullets high up into the air out over the water to come down atop a battleship. And of course, they would plummet through the decks of the battleship go deep down inside and literally blow up the battleship.

Person on tour: And of course, the battleship was mortified. (talking in the background) (laughter)

TH: That was the joke of the day. I'll have to remember that. I've never heard that, in 10 years.

EH: You just made it up. Good timing.

TH: If you could use your imagination here, this concrete wall out here. Imagine it going completely around in a square, four walls. This is just one side. Then it made a turn to the right down in the back there and in the back there was another long wall like we see in the front of us, and then another side wall coming up the back way over there.

The concrete pits covered with earth and sand were completely surrounded by this wall. And it's a weird wall, as you can see, it has steps built into it. Imagine an enemy force of soldiers landing on Sandy Hook looking for gun batteries to capture comes to this point and sees this wall. What can they do? They can easily scale up, climb up these steps, hang-jump down and get inside the wall. The U.S. Army made it very easy for the enemy soldiers to get inside. But once they fall down behind the wall, they are trapped. Because built into this corner you'll notice that the concrete protrudes out. That's actually a room. And in that room there were Gatling guns. Two guns face down the back wall and two guns face down this wall to rake the road and there was a road here that was clear of trees. There were no trees or shrubs growing here, just a clear view of fire. So if any enemy soldiers had come over the wall, they'd be mowed down by the Gatling guns. And then over in the far corner way over on the far side, were other rooms to fire down the other two rows behind the walls in the back side. So you could say they were firing inside the walls.

EH: In your day it was the "Bombproof"

Person on tour: When were they built?

TH: Back at the same time as Potter, the early 1890's.

FS: Talking about Gatling guns, I can tell you an interesting story. Years ago, before the War, the New York Guard took over the defense for the state. The National Guard now was in service. So what they did, they had to do something to test the capability of the New York State Guard. So what they did is, we fellas here, we practiced for several weeks by getting a wall similar to this and we took an incline plane, like 30 foot planks and placed them up on walls like this and we would run up there, and we would scale over the other side. Now we practiced that for weeks. We also practiced getting off of boats on ladders. Well, when the day came, we went down to invade Fort Tilden. And we pulled into the beaches of Fort Tilden. We went over the wall, everything was successful. Now the only thing that we had was bags of flour. So we went to the guns and we hit the guns with bags of flour. That would signify a hit. So, I was with two other fellas and now we were going to capture a place that was similar to this and we called it a bombproof. We went there and we were standing there a couple of guys with guns and we opened the doors and guys were sitting there with machine guns. We were hit! So it doesn't always work. So we lost. (laughter)

EH: So all that planning doesn't always work. (laughter) (Tape stops and starts)

(At Battery Kingman and Mills)

FS: You see, originally, you see this big circle here? That's where the gun used to be on. It used to be out here in the complete open. So in those days, you didn't have to be concerned about airplanes. Nobody thought about planes coming over. And this place was far enough from the ocean which was out that way and we thought that nobody could see these guns in place here. And very similar to the Maginot Line and the problem they had over in Europe this had a 360 degree radius, in other words, this gun could have been faced toward the City, faced toward Jersey and fired. So at what point, it was in '41 I guess, it was determined that just in case there was an invasion here, they didn't want these guns turned on, as they did in Germany when they turned the French guns around. So they decided to close this up. Now before, as I said, you have to remember that this was completely open. Now on this concrete, what they did, and I was here when they were doing it, they put layers of angled concrete, in other words, they poured huge slabs at maybe a 30-40 degree angle and then put other slabs that way and then put tons and tons of sand on top and I believe that they even double concreted it. They put, they felt that if a shell was to drop on here it would not hit at impact. It would slide and not cause any damage. And what they did was now they only gave you a limited area that the gun could point out limited about 30 degrees, 20 degrees about 30 degrees, I guess.

TH: You mean angled?

FS: No, horizontally, from left to right. I don't remember the degrees

TH: I think its 160 instead of 360.

FS: It wouldn't be quite that, I don't think. The point is that it would be limited only to the ocean traffic. (inaudible) It was limited to facing out over the ocean area. You could not turn that gun toward New York, you could not turn it toward the Jersey coast.

Person on tour: So they were afraid that the enemy would get hold of this?

FS: Oh sure because, here again, we knew that there were people landing on the beaches. They caught them out on Long Island. There were a lot of problems out here. There was a light cruiser at one point was hit out there and there was not a big deal made out of it, but there were an awful lot of wounded sailors brought into Sandy Hook, and being treated for severe burns. They were pulling them into various hospitals along this greater metropolitan area. So the word out was that, not that it was a submarine or whatever it might have been. We also had a fella that, are any of you fellas familiar with Deal and Sea Bright? Well, there is a Coast Guard station up there. We used to have a tower, I think it was about 75 feet high and we used to have four men man that tower around the clock. They used to observe the seacoast, the sea line, and they used to report into the Naval District and the Army District, one on the half hour and one on the hour if they sighted any kind of unusual boats out there or vessels. And we had a company clerk, that one day we were called out on alert in the middle of winter, and we were called out on the beaches. We had to man the machine guns and we were out there with rifles. Boy we cursed this guy to high heaven because we felt that he was just an alarmist. Well, several months later he got a commendation stating that because of his dedication and alertness,

and so forth, and I don't know what the wording was, but it had something to do with his reporting this vessel, that proper action was taken. But we never knew what it was, but those things were going on you know. So that's about all I can offer on that.

TH: If you can visualize, I should have brought the photograph, before this big concrete roof. This is called a casemate. The Army would call this a casemate. Some protective covering over your gun is called a casemate. Before this was added in 1941 and early 1942, the gun, you see the circle all filled in with dirt now, this was a deep pit. The back end of the gun was over there near the back part of the circle, and the barrel went out this way, going out this way and it was out in the open. The guns were built here, put here, back in 1919. And there was a gun on one side. We passed the other gun placement on the way coming in. And between the two guns, inside this hill, is a huge concrete blockhouse. Within that blockhouse you would be the plotting room, where Fred would be plotting the line of fire for one of these guns out to the target. And also, the rooms in there were for all the bullets, and all the gunpowder, and even the generators, too - generators to make electricity inside the tunnel system inside there. You had to keep everything out of sight because you didn't want one or two rounds from an enemy battleship to hit it because it would just blow up. But you would come out of a tunnel that comes out over back here to come out of the big concrete blockhouse that's underground over here. You come out with your bullet and your powder to the gun which was out in the open and stood on a big circular platform. And like Fred says, it's a double fear. Fear from dive bombers, as well as, if the enemy soldiers had landed here and taken these guns. Same thing as over in Fort Tilden which is right over by Brooklyn, over by Breezy Point, they had 16-inch guns over there. And imagine if the guns over here were taken by enemy soldiers and the guns over at Brooklyn were taken, they could all be pointed towards New York City and used by the enemy. So here, you sacrifice all around fire. When the guns were out in the open without a huge concrete roof, they could fire down the Jersey shore; they could fire toward New York Harbor they could fire to the Bay as well as the ocean. But that was sacrificed when this was put over. But it did protect them much better from aerial bombs.

TH: What did you do here?

FS: I was a Plotter. I was the fella that coordinated all the information that we got from the station observers. Then I coordinated. Then I had a fellow sending that information to the gun crew and that was placed that data in here. But my final job used to be to, I used to lay on a board, and that board was similar to this area and as these fellas would be setting those arms, as I mentioned before, they could see that vessel. I used to put a little instrument down here and I kept moving it as the ship was moving. And then, I would now determine, by measuring back how fast that boat was traveling. And I had rulers that were scaled for that distance. It was 14 miles, 12 miles. And then I would now predict where that boat would be, 30 seconds from now, so that when they fired, they would be firing at something that isn't there yet. They would be firing at a pre-set position. And that was the type of work we were doing.

Person on tour: What was the diameter of the gun?

FS: 12-inch. Yeah it was a 12 inch bore.

TH: I would like to say or ask you, how long did it take you to make a calculation? There were feeding you information from the spotters. The spotters were spotting the target.

FS: You were doing it, and here again 40 years takes away from specifics, but we used to have 30 second bells and it used to be on one minute, on two bells, that we used to set the calculations. It was almost instantaneous. This fella would have a headset on in Deal and the other fella might be at the other end of the Hook at the Coast Guard Station. And when they would read the reading that they had to get that triangulation that was instantaneous. So then the two fellas that were setting arms that was similar to their line of sight, they would be getting that information instantaneous because they had phones on. Now they would say to me "set," in other words, instantaneously they would have that section, and I would put my mark. Now they had an arm that would come out which would be equivalent to we knew, from this gun to where that target was, that would be in inches. And we would do it in yards. It was 800 yards to an inch that we were working with. So every inch represented 800 yards. So we would say "set" and that's the way we would operate.

TH: To simplify everything, Deal is way down the Jersey Shore down here and they would have soldiers in the tower spotting and they had towers up here at the north end. And you notice roughly, the gun batteries in the middle. So, you would have soldiers actually viewing the target and taking settings, telephoning it to Fred here at the gun battery, deep inside one of the concrete rooms. He will make the calculations in about a minute's time, it will come here, via telephone from Fred in the plotting room, to the gun commander and crew to sight the gun up and over. And every minute or so, the gun is being slowly moved and upped to the moving target. Today, your keen fast mind has been replaced by radar and computers that do it in mili-seconds when they guide a missile up at supersonic speed.

EH: What about this monorail?

FS: That monorail was put in there for the casemating. The shells used to come out of there. Prior to that, we used to use the wagons to bring the shells out. And here again, this is just one of the little things in my mind, we didn't fire it much after it was casemated. I think it was either two rounds or four rounds and when it was fired, I was underneath the gun emplacement. So that is one of the little things that has been erased from my mind. I don't remember how it was suspended to the breach of the gun. But I don't recall how it was rammed, that was one of the dead spots.

Person on tour: Did you ever have need to shoot at the targets?

FS: Oh, we shot at the targets but not at ships.

Person on tour: They were targets. Were there ever any enemy ships ever, or never?

FS: No, no never. We were never called to any active firing.

Person on tour: We were so well protected that they never dared come in here. Is that it?

FS: Well, the technology changed so fast that within that five years, we went from something that was like this. Not as improved as this was, but by 1942-'43 this stuff was obsolete. It just was not being used anymore.

TH: One of the weapons of war that made these coastal defense guns obsolete was the U-boat, the submarine. All of these big guns were designed to fire at surface ships, big battleships, cruisers, a ship you can see on the surface of the water. With the submarines under the water, here you are, your gun spotters are on the towers, if they can pick up a U-boat when it's on the surface or maybe in a periscope way out there and try and hit a U-boat, well that's a spot of luck. But it's a weapon like that, the U-boat and submarine, that made this obsolete.

Person on tour: A U-boat was made to hit other ship not land.

TH: We had to fight a global war, the reason we didn't see battleships like the *Bismarck*, you know the famous German battleship, come over this far, they just couldn't do it. That's why the *Bismarck* was sunk way over near England, over on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, because the Germans did not have aircraft carriers. They didn't have airplanes to protect their battleships, where as, we did. That is one of the big factors that we won World War II, because we strongly believed, and till this day we strongly believe in aircraft carriers, to put up airplanes, an umbrella of airplanes, to protect your other ships of the fleet. And imagine if the *Bismarck* had, well look what happened to it. It left Germany and got sunk off of England. Imagine if the *Bismarck* sailed over the ocean and these guns were waiting, as well as the Navy over at Floyd Bennet Field, had dive bombers waiting over at New York's Floyd Bennett Field, right across the harbor here combined with air power and the Coast Artillery, it was meaningless. You could easily sink the *Bismarck* here, as well as the British did over off of Scotland.

FS: Well, I have one more silly story to tell, that has to do with here. When this was being casemated, naturally the gun was not operational. So, what they used to do is they had the Corps of Engineers would have civilian employees come in here at night. They used to run sump pumps to pump the water, because this used to be a well. In other words, this was a big deep pit. While the construction was going on they used to have a fellow operate pumps to keep that thing dry. So we fellas, being a bunch of unruly guys, I had my car up here and we wanted to go joyriding, and I needed gasoline. So, we saw the guy had a five gallon can of gasoline standing there for that night. Well, it didn't matter, I had my car almost filled with gas and I had a two gallon can that I had filled up. So I not only had the gas in my car but I had it in the trunk. So we went joyriding and we had a good time. Well later on, I came back here, and the fella was almost crying. "Oh, my God, somebody stole my gasoline," he said. "I'm going to lose my job. I don't have

enough gas to run out to town and back and I'm going to be in trouble." So, I said to him the benefactor, "I have 2 gallons of gas in my car." And I said, "If you want, you can use that two gallons of gas." (laughter) He used it, and he thanked me and said, "If you ever need any help, I'll gladly give it to you." Shortly after that, they had huge trucks up here. They used to call them prime movers. These trucks, if you can picture some of these guys with these "hot rod" cars with huge tires and they stand way up high, like this. Well they had these huge trucks. They called them prime movers or land movers and they were up here carting the sand on top of this encasement. So this thing is in there working like a son-of-a-gun. So this one afternoon I said to one of the guys, "I could use some more gasoline." So we went up and tried to siphon it out of the tank, and we couldn't. So the guy said, "Well, how about under the truck? We can disconnect one of the gas lines". So we got out of the truck and got under the truck, ya know, the truck is about this high, and we opened the line and we filled our tank with gas. So now when we wanted to put the fitting back, we cross-threaded it and it was leaking gasoline. So I said we couldn't leave it like that so we looked and saw that there was a little shut off valve and we shut it off. Well, the next morning we came back to the guns and the engineers were up there and trying to start the truck but now the gas is shut off. So they're trying and they're trying. So now the poor guys now they put tractors on it and they're pulling this thing all over the hill trying to start it. So finally my conscience got to me. And I said to them, "Gee, I'll tell you what, I know something about cars," and I said, "Maybe I can help you." So I'm looking all over, fake, ya know. And I said to the fella, "Is that thing supposed to be shut off?" And he said, "No, my God, who turned that off?" And he turned it on and there was a little leak and they fixed it. And they got up there and "vroommm" the car started. And those fellas, they had undying gratitude for me. (laughter) That's the end of the story.

TH: You just mentioned that they only fired it a few times, to your knowledge, after they built this over the guns. Were you inside when they fired?

FS: Yeah. In fact, when it first fired, I told you those steel doors back here, inside there was where all the shells and the powder is kept. And those huge steel doors, which I said is about 5/8 inch thick, when the gun first fired and the concussion from the shock wave, bent those doors in like they were a little piece of metal. But then the engineers came in and drilled little holes in it. And then after the next firing it was okay. But in the back there, I was closer to the water side, when it went off, your arms actually flinched like that the concussion just reverberated through the area. Even deep inside there.

Person on tour: Can you take us down there just to see a little bit ?

FS: I don't think there is much there now.

TH: Let's go over here and look down, but there's no lights.

(inaudible recording inside battery)

FS: Very interesting thing here, the first Christmas when war was declared, that was December 1941. Several weeks later we were put on "alert status" and we had to sleep in here. We didn't sleep in our barracks. (talking in background) We used to sleep in there on cots. Well, we had heavy blankets and those comforters on and I believe we had steam heat in there. There was heat in the area. And we had our first so-called Christmas tree. We took an evergreen tree, and this was terrible. We cut down a holly tree. If they had caught the ones that had done it, it was a court martial. But I didn't do it. (laughter)

Every morning, we had to lift up the cots and put them in a pile, and that's where we slept. And every, and here again, I don't know if it was three days or five days, we would be rotated and permitted to go back to our barracks and spend one night in our barracks, but this is where we spent our first Christmas '41. And we almost had one of our first race riots right in here. It was nothing so terrible but it happened. It's a fact it was there. It was all of the fellas that were of Christian faith in a sense, that was our Christmas. It was kind of lonely. It was a heck of a feeling, to be in there and "Merry Christmas, God Bless you," ya know. And the fellas of the Jewish faith, and no reflection on it, this is not meant to be that way. But at that time, they were very much of a minority. So the Temple down in town arranged to come up here and pick up some of those fellas and go and have dinner at their house. I think it's called the Seder or something like that. And we were yelling to high heaven because we felt like were saying, "Why me." Ya know, "Why do I have to stay here?" But here again, it wasn't a religious thing, it was a factual thing that happened. But it wasn't any intent because they were Jewish or anything else. We were here and it was our Christmas.

EH: You were just feeling bad.

FS: We were feeling sorry for ourselves, ya know.

TH: Sounds like the Park Service down here. "I don't want to work on the weekends." "You're working on the weekends!" (laughter)

FS: Everybody gets to get off on Sundays.

EH: Fred, you might add that there was a very wide beach. I mean the erosion here is tremendous.

FS: Well, there used to be a bulkhead back here. There was a huge bulkhead.

FS: Unofficially, we used to do small arms fire back here. We weren't supposed to.

EH: At the bulkhead?

FS: No. We used to put the bottom of the shell cases on these 6-inch thick planks and we used to put them on the bulkhead and we used to fire at them with the .48 rifles and the pistols. But that was unofficial, ya know.

TH: So, you were firing out towards the Bay?

FS: We were firing at the people over at Leonardo.

EH: We are leaving the Kingman-Mills area and we are concluding a walk with a veteran on May 26, 1985 interviewing Sergeant Fred Schneider of Merrick, Long Island, who was stationed at Fort Hancock in 1940 through 1945, with the 245th Coast Artillery Battery F.

Our program this afternoon was conducted by Tom Hoffman, Park Historian, and recorded by Elaine Harmon, Museum Technician.

END OF INTERVIEW